The Silent Places - Stewart Edward White - (Non-technical)

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THE SILENT PLACES

Philip R. Goodwin 1903

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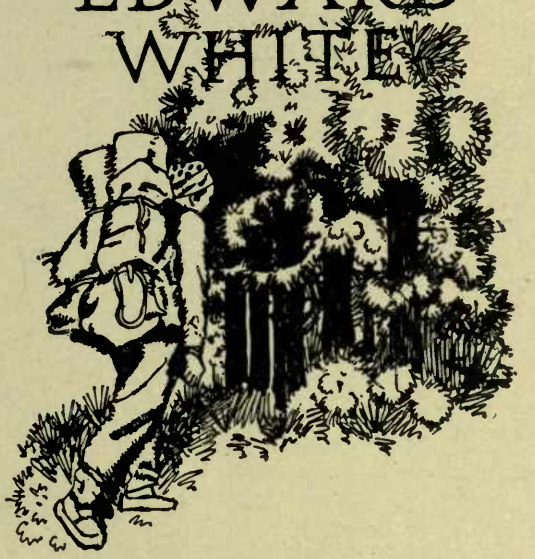

Garden City, New York
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.
1919

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To My Mother

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THE SILENT PLACES

CHAPTER ONE

At about eight o'clock one evening of the early summer a group of men were seated on a grass-plot overlooking a broad river. The sun was just setting through the forest fringe directly behind them.

Of this group some reclined in the short grass, others lay flat on the bank's slope, while still others leaned against the carriages of two highly ornamented field-guns, whose embossed muzzles gaped silently at an eastern shore nearly two miles distant.

The men were busy with soft-voiced talk, punctuating their remarks with low laughter of a singularly infectious character. It was strange speech, richly embroidered with the musical names of places, with unfamiliar names of beasts, and with unintelligible names of things. Kenógami, Mamátawan, Wenebógan, Kapúskasíng, the silver-fox, the sea-otter, the sable, the wolverine, the musk-ox,

parka, babiche, tump-line, giddés,—these and others sang like arrows cleaving the atmosphere of commoner words. In the distant woods the white-throats and olive thrushes called in a language hardly less intelligible.

There scarcely needed the row of glistening birch-barks below the men, the warehouse with its picketed lane, the tall flag-staff, the block-house stockade, the half-bred women chatting over the low fences of the log-houses, the squaws wandering to and fro in picturesque silence, the Indian children playing noisily or standing in awe before the veranda of the white house, to inform the initiated that this little forest- and river-girt settlement was a post of the Honourable the Hudson's Bay Company. The time of sunset and the direction of the river's flow would have indicated a high latitude. The mile-long meadow, with its Indian camp, the oval of forest, the immense breadth of the river identified the place as Conjuror's House. Thus the blue water in the distance was James Bay, the river was the Moose; enjoying his Manila cheroot on the Factory veranda with the other officers of the Company was Galen Albret, and these men lounging

on the river bank were the Company's post-keepers and runners, the travellers of the Silent Places.

They were of every age and dressed in a variety of styles. All wore ornamented moccasins, bead garters, and red sashes of worsted. As to the rest, each followed his taste. So in the group could be seen bare heads, fillet-bound heads, covered heads; shirt sleeves, woollen jerseys, and long, beautiful blanket coats. Two things, however, proved them akin. They all possessed a lean, wiry hardness of muscle and frame, a hawk-like glance of the eye, an almost emaciated spareness of flesh on the cheeks. They all smoked pipes of strong plug tobacco.

Whether the bronze of their faces, thrown into relief by the evening glow, the frowning steadiness of their eyes, or more fancifully the background of the guns, the flag-staff and the stockade was most responsible, the militant impression persisted strongly. These were the veterans of an hundred battles. They were of the stuff forlorn hopes are fashioned from. A great enemy, a powerful enemy, an enemy to be respected and feared had hardened them to the unyielding. The adversary could almost be measured, the bitterness of the struggle

almost be gauged from the scars of their spirits; the harshness of it, the cruelty of it, the wonderful immensity of it that should so fashion the souls and flesh of men. For to the bearing of these loungers clung that hint of greater things which is never lacking to those who have called the deeps of man's nature to the conquering.

The sun dipped to the horizon, and over the landscape slipped the beautiful north-country haze of crimson. From the distant forest sounded a single mournful wolf-howl. At once the sledge-dogs answered in chorus. The twilight descended. The men gradually fell silent, smoking their pipes, savouring the sharp snow-tang, grateful to their toughened senses, that still lingered in the air.

Suddenly out of the dimness loomed the tall form of an Indian, advancing with long, straight strides. In a moment he was among them responding composedly to their greetings.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou', Me-en-gen," said they.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'," said he.

He touched two of the men lightly on the shoulder. They arose, for they knew him as the bows-

man of the Factor's canoe, and so understood that Galen Albret desired their presence.

Me-en-gen led the way in silence, across the grass-plot, past the flag-staff, to the foot of the steps leading to the Factory veranda. There the Indian left them. They mounted the steps. A voice halted them in the square of light cast through an intervening room from a lighted inner apartment.

The veranda was wide and low; railed in; and, except for the square of light, cast in dimness. A dozen men sat in chairs, smoking. Across the shaft of light the smoke eddied strangely. A woman's voice accompanied softly the tinkle of a piano inside. The sounds, like the lamplight, were softened by the distance of the intervening room.

Of the men on the veranda Galen Albret's identity alone was evident. Grim, four-square, inert, his very way of sitting his chair, as though it were a seat of judgment and he the interpreter of some fierce blood-law, betrayed him. From under the bushy white tufts of his eyebrows the woodsmen felt the search of his inspection. Unconsciously they squared their shoulders.

The older had some fifty-five or sixty years,

though his frame was still straight and athletic. A narrow-brimmed slouch hat shadowed quiet, gray eyes, a hawk nose, a long sweeping white mustache. His hands were tanned to a hard mahogany-brown carved into veins, cords, and gnarled joints. He had kindly humour in the wrinkles of his eyes, the slowly developed imagination of the forest-dweller in the deliberation of their gaze, and an evident hard and wiry endurance. His dress, from the rough pea-jacket to the unornamented moccasins, was severely plain.

His companion was hardly more than a boy in years, though more than a man in physical development. In every respect he seemed to be especially adapted to the rigours of northern life. The broad arch of his chest, the plump smoothness of his muscles, above all, the full roundness of his throat indicated that warmth-giving blood, and plenty of it, would be pumped generously to every part of his body. His face from any point of view but one revealed a handsome, jaunty boy, whose beard was still a shade. But when he looked at one directly, the immaturity fell away. This might have been because of a certain confidence of experience beyond

what most boys of twenty can know, or it might have been the result merely of a physical peculiarity. For his eyes were so extraordinarily close together that they seemed by their very proximity to pinch the bridge of his nose, and in addition, they possessed a queer slant or cast which twinkled perpetually now in one, now in the other. It invested him at once with an air singularly remote and singularly determined. But at once when he looked away the old boyishness returned, enhanced further by a certain youthful barbarity in the details of his dress—a slanted heron's feather in his hat, a beaded knife-sheath, an excess of ornamentation on his garters and moccasins, and the like.

In a moment one of the men on the veranda began to talk. It was not Galen Albret, though Galen Albret had summoned them, but MacDonald, his Chief Trader and his right-hand man. Galen Albret himself made no sign, but sat, his head sunk forward, watching the men's faces from his cavernous eyes.

"You have been called for especial duty," began MacDonald, shortly. "It is volunteer duty, and you need not go unless you want to. We have

called you because you have the reputation of never having failed. That is not much for you, Herron, because you are young. Still we believe in you. But you, Bolton, are an old hand on the Trail, and it means a good deal."

Galen Albret stirred. MacDonald shot a glance in his direction and hastened on.

"I am going to tell you what we want. If you don't care to tackle the job, you must know nothing about it. That is distinctly understood?"

He hitched forward nearer the light, scanning the men carefully. They nodded.

"Sure!" added Herron.

"That's all right. Do you men remember Jingoss, the Ojibway, who outfitted here a year ago last summer?"

"Him they calls th' Weasel?" inquired Sam Bolton.

"That's the one. Do you remember him well? how he looks?"

"Yes," nodded Sam and Dick Herron together.

"We've got to have that Indian."

"Where is he?" asked Herron. Sam Bolton remained silent.

"That is for you to find out." MacDonald then went on to explain himself, hitching his chair still nearer, and lowering his voice. "A year ago last summer," said he, "he got his 'debt' at the store of two hundred castors* which he was to pay off in pelts the following spring. He never came back. I don't think he intends to. The example is bad. It has never happened to us before. Too many Indians get credit at this Post. If this man is allowed to go unpunished, we'll be due for all sorts of trouble with our other debtors. Not only he, but all the rest of them, must be made to feel that an embezzler is going to be caught, every time. They all know he's stolen that debt, and they're waiting to see what we're going to do about it. I tell you this so you'll know that it's important."

"You want us to catch him?" said Bolton, more as a comment than an inquiry.

"Catch him, and catch him alive!" corrected MacDonald. "There must be no shooting. We've got to punish him in a way that will make him an example. We've got to allow our Indians 'debt' in order to keep them. If we run too great a risk of

* One hundred dollars.

loss, we cannot do it. That is a grave problem. In case of success you shall have double pay for the time you are gone, and be raised two ranks in the service. Will you do it?"

Sam Bolton passed his emaciated, gnarled hand gropingly across his mouth, his usual precursor of speech. But Galen Albret abruptly interposed, speaking directly, with authority, as was his habit.

"Hold on," said he, "I want no doubt. If you accept this, you must not fail. Either you must come back with that Indian, or you need not come back at all. I won't accept any excuses for failure. I won't accept any failure. It does not matter if it takes ten years. *I want that man.*"

Abruptly he fell silent. After a moment MacDonald resumed his speech.

"Think well. Let me know in the morning."

Bolton again passed his hand gropingly before his mouth.

"No need to wait for me," said he; "I'll do it."

Dick Herron suddenly laughed aloud, startling to flight the gravities of the moment.

"If Sam here's got her figured out, I've no need to worry," he asserted. "I'm with you."

"Very well," agreed MacDonald. "Remember, this must be kept quiet. Come to me for what you need."

"I will say good-by to you now," said Galen Albret. "I do not wish to be seen talking to you to-morrow."

The woodsmen stepped forward, and solemnly shook Galen Albret's hand. He did not arise to greet these men he was sending out into the Silent Places, for he was the Factor, and not to many is it given to rule a country so rich and extended. They nodded in turn to the taciturn smokers, then glided away into the darkness on silent, moccasined feet.

The night had fallen. Here and there through the gloom shone a lamp. Across the north was a dim glow of phosphorescence, precursor of the aurora, from which occasionally trembled for an instant a single shaft of light. The group by the bronze field-cannon were humming softly the sweet and tender cadences of *La Violette dandine.*

Instinctively the two woodsmen paused on the hither side of rejoining their companions. Bolton's eyes were already clouded with the trouble of his speculation. Dick Herron glanced at his com-

rade quizzically, the strange cast flickering in the wind of his thought.

"Oh, Sam!" said he.

"What?" asked the older man, rousing.

"Strikes me that by the time we get through drawin' that double pay on this job, we'll be rich men—and old!"

CHAPTER TWO

The men stood looking vaguely upward at the stars.

Dick Herron whipped the grasses with a switch he had broken in passing a willow-bush. His mind was little active. Chiefly he regretted the good time he had promised himself here at the Post after the labour of an early spring march from distant Winnipeg. He appreciated the difficulties of the undertaking, but idly, as something that hardly concerned him. The details, the planning, he dismissed from his mind, confident that his comrade would rise to that. In time Sam Bolton would show him the point at which he was to bend his strength. Then he would stoop his shoulders, shut his eyes, and apply the magnificent brute force and pluck that was in him. So now he puckered his lips to the sibilance of a canoe-song, and waited.

But the other, Sam Bolton, the veteran woodsman, stood in rapt contemplation, his wide-seeing,

gentle eyes of the old man staring with the magnitude of his revery.

Beyond the black velvet band lay the wilderness. There was the trackless country, large as the United States itself, with its great forests, its unmapped bodies of water, its plains, its barren grounds, its mountains, its water courses wider even than the Hudson River. Moose and bear, true lords of the forest, he might see any summer day. Herds of caribou, sometimes thousands strong, roamed its woodlands and barrens. Wolves, lurking or bold as their prey was strong or weak, clung to the caribou bands in hope of a victim. Wolverines,—unchanged in form from another geological period—marten, mink, fisher, otter, ermine, muskrat, lynx, foxes, beaver carried on their varied affairs of murder or of peaceful industry. Woods Indians, scarcely less keen of sense or natural of life than the animals, dwelt in their wigwams of bark or skins, trapped and fished, made their long migrations as the geese turn following their instinct. Sun, shadow, rain, cold, snow, hunger, plenty, labour, or the peaceful gliding of rivers, these had watched by the Long Trail in the years Sam Bolton had followed

it. He sensed them now dimly, instinctively, waiting by the Trail he was called upon to follow.

Sam Bolton had lived many years in the forest, and many years alone. Therefore he had imagination. It might be of a limited quality, but through it he saw things in their essences.

Now from the safe vantage ground of the camp, from the breathing space before the struggle, he looked out upon the wilderness, and in the wilderness he felt the old, inimical Presence as he had felt it for forty years. The scars of that long combat throbbed through his consciousness. The twisting of his strong hands, the loosening of the elasticity, the humbling of the spirit, the caution that had displaced the carelessness of youth, the keenness of eye, the patience,—all these were at once the marks of blows and the spoils of victory received from the Enemy. The wilderness, calm, ruthless, just, terrible, waited in the shadow of the forest, seeking no combat, avoiding none, conquering with a lofty air of predestination, yielding superbly as though the moment's victory for which a man had strained the fibres of his soul were, after all, a little, unimportant thing; never weary, never exultant, dispas-

sionate, inevitable, mighty, whose emotions were silence, whose speech was silence, whose most terrible weapon was the great white silence that smothered men's spirits. Sam Bolton clearly saw the North. He felt against him the steady pressure of her resistance. She might yield, but relentlessly regained her elasticity. Men's efforts against her would tire; the mechanics of her power remained constant. What she lost in the moments of her opponent's might, she recovered in the hours of his weakness, so that at the last she won, poised in her original equilibrium above the bodies of her antagonists. Dimly he felt these things, personifying the wilderness in his imagination of the old man, arranging half-consciously his weapons of craft in their due order.

Somewhere out beyond in those woods, at any one of the thirty-two points of the compass, a man was lurking. He might be five or five hundred miles away. He was an expert at taking care of himself in the woods. Abruptly Sam Bolton began to formulate his thoughts aloud.

"We got to keep him or anybody else from knowin' we's after him, Dick," said he. "Jest as

soon as he knows that, it's just too easy for him to keep out of our way. Lucky Jingoss is an Ojibway, and his people are way off south. We can fool this crowd here easy enough; we'll tell 'em we're looking for new locations for winter posts. But she's an awful big country."

"Which way 'll we go first?" asked Dick, without, however, much interest in the reply. Whatever Sam decided was sure to be all right.

"It's this way," replied the latter. "He's got to trade somewheres. He can't come into any of the Posts here at the Bay. What's the nearest? Why, Missináibie, down in Lake Superior country. Probably he's down in that country somewheres. We'll start south."

"That's Ojibway country," hazarded Dick at random.

"It's Ojibway country, but Jingoss is a Georgian Bay Ojibway. Down near Missináibie every Injun has his own hunting district, and they're different from our Crees,—they stick pretty close to their district. Any strangers trying to hunt and trap there are going to get shot, sure pop. That makes me think that if Jingoss has gone south, and

if he's trading now at Missináibie, and if he ain't chummed up with some of them Ojibways to get permission to trap in their allotments, and if he ain't pushed right on home to his own people or out west to Winnipeg country, then most likely we'll find him somewheres about the region of th' Kabinakágam."

"So we'll go up th' Missináibie River first," surmised Dick.

"That's how we'll make a start," assented Bolton.

As though this decision had terminated an interview, they turned with one accord toward the dim group of their companions. As they approached, they were acclaimed.

"Here he is," "Dick, come here," "Dick, sing us the song. Chante donc 'Oncle Naid,' Deeck."

And Dick, leaning carelessly against the breech of the field-guns, in a rich, husky baritone crooned to the far north the soft syllables of the far south.

" Oh, there was an old darkey, and his name was Uncle Ned,
And he lived long ago, long ago!"

CHAPTER THREE

In the selection of paddles early next morning Sam insisted that the Indian rule be observed, measuring carefully that the length of each implement should just equal the height of its wielder. He chose the narrow maple blade, that it might not split when thrust against the bottom to check speed in a rapid. Further the blades were stained a brilliant orange.

Dick Herron had already picked one of a dozen birch-bark canoes laid away under the bridge over the dry coulee. He knew a good canoe as you would know a good horse. Fourteen feet it measured, of the heavy winter-cut of bark, and with a bottom all of one piece, without cracks or large knots.

The canoe and the paddles they laid at the water's edge. Then they went together to the great warehouse, behind the grill of whose upper room MacDonald was writing. Ordinarily the trappers were not allowed inside the grill, but Dick and Sam

were told to help themselves freely. The stocking Dick left to his older companion, assuring himself merely of an hundred rounds of ammunition for his new model Winchester rifle, the 44-40 repeater, then just entering the outskirts of its popularity.

In the obscurity of the wide, low room the old woodsman moved to and fro, ducking his head to avoid things hanging, peering into corners, asking an occasional question of MacDonald, who followed him silently about. Two small steel traps, a narrow, small-meshed fish-net, a fish-line and hooks, powder, ball, and caps for the old man's muzzle-loader, a sack of salt were first laid aside. This represented subsistence. Then matches, a flint-and-steel machine, two four-point blankets. These meant warmth. Then ten pounds of plug tobacco and as many of tea. These were necessary luxuries. And finally a small sack of flour and a side of bacon. These were merely a temporary provision; when they should be exhausted, the men would rely wholly on the forest.

Sam Bolton hovered over the pile, after it was completed, his eyes half shut, naming over its items again and again, assuring himself that nothing

lacked. At his side MacDonald made suggestions.

"Got a copper pail, Sam? a frying-pan? cups? How about the axe? Better have an extra knife between you. Need any clothes? Compass all right?"

To each of these questions Sam nodded an assent. So MacDonald, having named everything—with the exception of the canvas square to be used as a tarpaulin or a tent, and soap and towel—fell silent, convinced that he could do nothing more.

But Dick, who had been drumming his fingers idly against the window, turned with a suggestion of his own.

"How're we fixed for shoe pacs? I haven't got any."

At once MacDonald looked blank.

"By George, boys, I ain't got but four or five pairs of moccasins in the place! There's plenty of oil tan; I can fix you all right there. But smoke tans! That Abítibi gang mighty near cleaned me out. You'll have to try the Indians."

Accordingly Bolton and Herron took their way in the dusty little foot-trodden path—there were

no horses in that frontier—between the Factor's residence and the Clerk's house, down the meandering trail through the high grasses of the meadow to where the Indian lodges lifted their pointed tops against the sky.

The wigwams were scattered apparently at random. Before each a fire burned. Women and girls busied themselves with a variety of camp-work. A tame crow hopped and fluttered here and there just out of reach of the pointed-nosed, shaggy wolf-dogs.

The latter rushed madly forward at the approaching strangers, yelping in a curious, long-drawn bay, more suggestive of their wolf ancestors than of the domestic animal. Dick and Sam laid about them vigorously with short staffs they had brought for the purpose. Immediately the dogs, recognising their dominance, slunk back. Three men sauntered forward, grinning broadly in amiable greeting. Two or three women, more bashful than the rest, scuttled into the depths of wigwams out of sight. A multitude of children concealed themselves craftily, like a covey of quail, and focussed their bright, bead-like eyes on the new-

comers. The rest of the camp went its way unmoved.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'," greeted Sam Bolton.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'," replied the three.

These Indians were of the far upper country. They spoke no English nor French, and adhered still to their own tribal customs and religious observances. They had lingered several days beyond their time for the purpose of conjuring. In fact at this very moment the big medicine lodge raised itself in the centre of the encampment like a miniature circus tent. Sam Bolton addressed the two in their own language.

"We wish to buy many moccasins of your old women," said Sam.

Immediately one of the Indians glided away. From time to time during the next few minutes he was intermittently visible as he passed from the dark interior of one wigwam, across the sunlight, and into the dark interior of another.

The older of the two still in company of the white men began to ask questions.

"The Little Father is about to make a long journey?"

"Does one buy so many moccasins for a short?"

"He goes to hunt the fur?"

"Perhaps."

"In what direction does he set the bow of his canoe?"

Suddenly Dick Herron, who had, as usual, been paying attention to almost anything rather than the matter in hand, darted suddenly toward a clump of grass. In a moment he straightened his back to hold at arm's length a struggling little boy. At the instant of his seizure the child uttered a sharp cry of fright, then closed his lips in the stoicism of his race.

That one cry was enough, however. Rescue darted from the nearest wigwam. A flying figure covered the little distance in a dozen graceful leaps, snatched the child from the young man's hands and stood, one foot advanced, breast heaving, a palpitating, wild thing, like a symbol of defiance.

The girl belonged distinctly to the more attractive type; it required but little imagination to endow her with real beauty. Her figure was straight and slim and well-proportioned, her eyes large, her face oval and quite devoid of the broad, high-

cheeked stupidity so common in the northern races. At the moment she flashed like a brand with quick-breathed anger and fear.

Dick looked at her at first with amazement, then with mingled admiration and mischief. He uttered a ferocious growl and lowered his shoulders as though about to charge. Immediately the defiance broke. The girl turned and fled, plunging like a rabbit into the first shelter that offered, pursued by shrieks of delight from the old squaws, a pleased roar from Dick, and the laughter of the Indian men themselves.

"May-may-gwán,"* said the oldest Indian, naming her, "foster sister to the boy you had caught."

"She is Ojibway, then," exclaimed Dick, catching at the Ojibway word.

"Ae," admitted the Cree, indifferently. Such inclusions of another tribe, either by adoption or marriage, are not uncommon.

At this moment the third Indian approached.

"No moccasins," he reported. "Plenty buckskin."

* The Butterfly.

Sam Bolton looked troubled. This meant a delay. However, it could not be avoided.

"Let the old women make some," he decided.

The Cree old-man shook his head.

"That cannot be. There is not time. We turn our canoes to the Missináibie by next sun."

Sam pondered again, turning over in his mind this fresh complication. But Dick, kicking the earth clods in impatience, broke in.

"Well, we're going by the Missináibie, too. Let the women make the moccasins. We will accompany you."

"That might be," replied the Indian.

"It is well," said Bolton.

An old woman was summoned. She measured her customers' feet with a buckskin thong. Then they departed without further ceremony. An Indian rarely says farewell. When his business is finished he goes.

"Dick," said Sam, "you ought not to have broke in there."

"What do you mean?" asked the other, puzzled.

"Suggesting our travelling with them."

"Why?" cried Dick in astonishment. "Ain't you never travelled with Injuns before?"

"That ain't th' question. Did you notice that third Injun? the one who didn't do any talking?"

"Sure! What of him?"

"Well, he's an Ojibway. Th' rest are Wood Crees. And I miss my guess if he ain't a bad customer. He watched us mighty close, and his eyes are bad. He's sharp. He's one of that wondering kind. He's wondering now who we are, and where we're going, and why we're hitting so long a trail. And what's more, he belongs to this Jingoss's people in a roundabout sort of way. He's worse than fifty Crees. Maybe he knows all about Jingoss, and if he does, he'll get suspicious the minute we angle down into that country."

"Let's let 'em slide, then," suggested Dick, impatiently. "Let's buy some buckskin and make our own moccasins."

"Too late now," negatived Sam. "To back out would be bad."

"Oh, well, you're just borrowing trouble anyway," laughed Dick.

"Maybe, maybe," acknowledged the other; "but

borrowing trouble, and then figuring out how you're going to meet it if it comes to you in good earnest, is mighty good woodcraft."

"Sam," burst out Dick, whose attention had been caught by a word in his companion's first speech, and whose mind had been running on it throughout the ensuing discussion, "did you notice that girl? She's a tearing little beauty!"

CHAPTER FOUR

By now it was nearly noon. The travellers carried the packs they had made up down to the water-side where the canoe lay. Although the Indians would not get under way until the following morning, it had been decided to push on at once, thus avoiding the confusion of a crowded start.

In the course of the morning's business the news of their expedition had noised abroad. Especially were they commiserated by the other runners and post-keepers. During all the winter these men had lived under the frown of the North, conducting their affairs confidently yet with caution, sure of themselves, yet never sure of the great power in whose tolerance they existed, in spite of whom they accomplished. Now was the appointed time of rest. In the relaxation of the thought they found pity for those ordered out of season into the Silent Places.

So at the river's bank Sam Bolton and Dick Her-

ron, ready for departure, found a group gathered. It was supposed that these men were to act as scouts, to reconnoitre shrewdly in the Enemy's country, to spy out the land, so that in the autumn the Company might throw into the wilderness new posts, to be inhabited during the colder months.

"Look heem Bla'k Bevair Lak," advised Louis Placide; "I t'ink dose Ojibway mak' heem lots marten, mink la bas."

"Lads," said Kern, the trader at Old Brunswick House, "if you're going up th' Missináibie just cast an eye on my *cache* at Gull Lake, and see that the carcajaus have let her be."

Young Herbert was curious. "Where are you headed, boys?" he inquired.

But Ki-wa-nee, the trusty, the trader at Flying Post, the only Indian in the Company's service holding rank as a commissioned officer, grunted in contempt at the question, while Achard, of New Brunswick House, motioned warningly toward the groups of Indian trappers in the background. "Hush, boy," said he to Herbert, "news travels, and in the south are the Free Traders to snatch at a new country."

By now the voyageurs had turned their canoe over, slid it into the water, and piled the duffle amidships.

But before they had time to step aboard, came Virginia Albret, then seventeen years old and as slender and graceful as a fawn. The daughter of the Factor, she had acquired a habit of command that became her well. While she enunciated her few and simple words of well-wishing, she looked straight out at them from deep black eyes. The two woodsmen, awed into a vast respect, fumbled their caps in their hands and noted, in the unconscious manner of the forest frequenter, the fresh dusk rose of her skin, the sharply defined red of her lips, the soft wheat colour of her hair. It was a gracious memory to carry into the Silent Places, and was in itself well worth the bestowal. However, Virginia, as was her habit, gave presents. On each she bestowed a long silk handkerchief. Sam Bolton, with a muttered word of thanks, stuffed his awkwardly into his shirt bosom. Dick, on the other hand, with a gesture half of gallantry, half of bravado, stripped his own handkerchief from his neck and cast it far into the current, knotting the girl's

gift in its place. Virginia smiled. A strong push sent the canoe into the current. They began to paddle up-stream.

For perhaps a mile their course threaded in and out the channel of a number of islands, then shot them into the broad reach of the Moose itself. There they set themselves to straight-forward paddling, hugging closely the shore that they might escape as much as possible the full strength of the current. In this manner they made rapid progress, for, of course, they paddled in the Indian fashion —without bending either elbow, and with a strong thrust forward of the shoulders at the end of the stroke—and they understood well how to take advantage of each little back eddy.

After an hour and a half they came to the first unimportant rapids, where they were forced to drop their paddles and to use the long spruce-poles they had cut and peeled that morning. Dick had the bow. It was beautiful to see him standing boldly upright, his feet apart, leaning back against the pressure, making head against the hurrying water. In a moment the canoe reached the point of hardest suction, where the river broke over the descent.

Then the young man, taking a deep breath, put forth the strength that was in him. Sam Bolton, poised in the stern, holding the canoe while his companion took a fresh hold, noted with approval the boy's physical power, the certainty of his skill at the difficult river work, the accuracy of his calculations. Whatever his heedlessness, Dick Herron knew his trade. It was, indeed, a powerful instrument that Galen Albret in his wisdom had placed in Sam Bolton's hands.

The canoe, torn from the rapid's grasp, shot into the smooth water above. Calmly Sam and Dick shook the water from their poles and laid them across the thwarts. The *swish click! swish click!* of the paddles resumed.

Now the river began to hurry in the ten-mile descent below the Abítibi. Although the smooth rush of water was unbroken by the swirls of rapids, nevertheless the current proved too strong for paddling. The voyagers were forced again to the canoe poles, and so toiled in graceful but strenuous labour the remaining hours of their day's journey. When finally they drew ashore for the night, they had but just passed the mouth of French River.

To men as skilled as they, the making of camp was a brief affair. Dick, with his axe, cleared the space of underbrush, and sought dry wood for fuel. The older man in the meantime hunted about until he found a dead white-birch sapling. This he easily thrust to the ground with a strong push of his hand. The jar burst here and there the hard envelope of the birch bark to expose a quantity of half-powdery, decayed wood, dry as tinder and almost as inflammable as gunpowder. Into a handful of this Sam threw the sparks from his flint and steel. The bark itself fed admirably the first flame. By the time Dick returned, the fire was ready for his fuel.

They cooked tea in the copper pail, and roasted bacon on the ends of switches. This, with bread from the Post, constituted their meal. After supper they smoked, banked the fire with green wood, and rolled themselves in their blankets to sleep. It was summer, so they did not trouble to pitch their shelter.

The night died into silence. Slowly the fire worked from within through the chinks of the green logs. Forest creatures paused to stare at it with

steady eyes, from which flashed back a blaze as intense as the fire's own. An owl took his station near and began to call. Overhead the brilliant aurora of the Far North palpitated in a silence that seemed uncanny when coupled with such intensity of movement. Shadows stole here and there like acolytes. Breezes rose and died like the passing of a throng. The woods were peopled with uncanny influences, intangible, unreal, yet potent with the symbolism of the unknown Presence watching these men. The North, calm, patient, biding her time, serene in the assurance of might, drew close to the camp in the wilderness.

By and by a little pack of wolves came and squatted on their haunches just in the shadow. They were well fed and harmless, but they sat there blinking lazily at the flames, their tongues lolling, exactly like so many shaggy and good-humoured dogs. About two o'clock Dick rolled out of his blanket and replenished the fire. He did it somnolently, his eyes vacant, his expression that of a child. Then he took a half-comprehending glance at the heaven's promise of fair weather, and sank again into the warmth of his blanket. The wolves had not stirred.

CHAPTER FIVE

Now the small sack of flour and the side of bacon and the loose provisions brought from the Post could last but a little time, and the journey was like to be long. The travellers were to be forced from now on, just as are the wolves, the eagles, the hawks, the carcajous, and other predatory creatures of the woods, to give their first thoughts to the day's sustenance. All other considerations gave way to this. This was the first, the daily tribute to be wrested from the stubborn grasp of the North. Winning that, anything was possible; failing that, nothing could follow but defeat. Therefore, valuable exceedingly were the two little steel traps and the twelve-foot length of gill-net, the sharp, thin knives in the beaded sheaths, and especially precious, precious above all things else, the three hundred rounds of ammunition for the rifles. They must be guarded and cared for and saved.

Therefore an incident of the early afternoon was more than welcome.

All the morning they had toiled against the current, sometimes poling, sometimes "tracking" by means of a sixty-foot cod-line. Dick looped this across his chest and pulled like a horse on the tow-path, while Sam Bolton sat in the stern with the steering-paddle. The banks were sometimes precipitous, sometimes stony, sometimes grown to the water's edge with thick vegetation. Dick had often to wade, often to climb and scramble, sometimes even to leap from one foothold to another. Only rarely did he enjoy level footing and the opportunity for a straight pull. Suddenly in a shallow pool, near the river's edge, and bordered with waist-high grass, he came upon a flock of black ducks. They were full grown, but as yet unable to fly. Dick dropped his tow-line and ran forward with a shout. At once the ducks became confused, scattering in all directions, squawking madly, spattering the water. The mother flew. The brood, instead of making for the open river, where it would have been safe, scuttled into the tall grasses.

Here was the chance for fresh meat without the expenditure of a shot. Sam Bolton promptly disembarked. To us it would have seemed a simple matter. But the black duck is an expert at concealment, even in the open. He can do wonders at it when assisted by the shadows of long grass. And when too closely approached he can glide away to right and left like a snake, leaving no rustle to betray his passage. Five minutes passed before the first was discovered. Then it was only because Dick's keen eye had detected a faintly stirring grass-blade ten feet away, and because Dick's quick muscles had brought him like a tiger to the spot. He held up his victim by the neck.

"Good enough," growled Sam.

And although they had seen nine ducks go into the grass plot, which was not more than fifty feet across, they succeeded in finding but three. However, they were satisfied.

In spite of the deliberation of their journeying, the Indians did not overtake them until nearly dark. It was just above the junction of the Abítibi. The river was without current, the atmosphere without the suspicion of a breeze. Down to the very

water's edge grew the forest, so velvet-dark that one could not have guessed where the shadow left off and the reflection began. Not a ripple disturbed the peace of the water, nor a harsh sound the twilight peace of the air. Sam and Dick had paddled for some time close to one bank, and now had paused to enjoy their pipes and the cool of the evening. Suddenly against the reflected sky at the lower bend a canoe loomed into sight, and crept smoothly and noiselessly under the forest shadow of the opposite bank. Another followed, then another, and another and still another in regular interval. Not a sound could be heard. In the distance their occupants gave the illusion of cowled figures,—the Indian women close wrapped in their shawls, dropping their heads modestly or turning them aside as their customs commanded them to do on encountering strangers. Against the evening glow of the reflected sky for a single instant they stood out in the bright yellow of the new birch-bark, the glow of warm colour on the women's dress. Then instantaneously, in the darkness of the opposite bank, they faded wraith-like and tenuous. Like phantoms of the past they glided by, a river's width

away; then vanished around the upper bend. A moment later the river was empty.

"Th' squaws goin' ahead to start camp," commented Sam Bolton, indifferently; "we'll have th' bucks along pretty quick."

They drove their paddles strongly, and drifted to the middle of the river.

Soon became audible shouts, cries, and laughter, the click of canoe poles. The business of the day was over. Until nearly sundown the men's canoes had led, silent, circumspect, seeking game at every bend of the river. Now the squaws had gone on to make camp. No more game was to be expected. The band relaxed, joking, skylarking, glad to be relieved for a little while of the strain of attention.

In a moment the canoes appeared, a long, unbroken string, led by Haukemah. In the bow sat the chief's son, a lad of nine, wielding his little paddle skilfully, already intelligent to twist the prow sharply away from submerged rocks, learning to be a canoe-man so that in the time to come he might go on the Long Trail.

Each canoe contained, besides its two occupants, a variety of household goods, and a dog or two

coiled and motionless, his sharp nose resting between his outstretched forepaws. The tame crow occupied an ingenious cage of twisted osiers.

Haukemah greeted the two white men cordially, and stopped paddling to light his pipe. One by one the other canoes joined them. A faint haze of tobacco rose from the drifting group.

"My brothers have made a long sun," observed old Haukemah. "We, too, have hastened. Now we have met, and it is well. Down past the white rock it became the fortune of Two-fingers to slay a caribou that stood by the little water.* Also had we whitefish the evening before. Past the Island of the Three Trees were signs of moose." He was telling them the news, as one who passed the time of day.

"We have killed but neenee-sheeb, the duck," replied Dick, holding up one of the victims by the neck, "nor have we seen the trail of game."

"Ah hah," replied Haukemah, politely.

He picked up his paddle. It was the signal to start.

"Drop in astern," said Dick to his companion in

* A spring.

English, "it's the light of the evening, and I'm going to troll for a pickerel."

One by one the canoes fell into line. Now, late in the day, the travel was most leisurely. A single strong stroke of the paddle was always succeeded by a pause of contemplation. Nevertheless the light craft skimmed on with almost extraordinary buoyancy, and in silent regularity the wooded points of the river succeeded one another.

Sam busied himself with the trolling-spoon, but as soon as the last canoe was well beyond hearing he burst out:

"Dick, did you notice the Chippewa?"

"No. What?"

"He understands English."

"How do you know?"

"He was right behind us when you told me you were goin' to try the fishing, and he moved out th' way before we'd raised our paddles."

"Might have been an accident."

"Perhaps, but I don't believe it. He looked too almighty innocent. Another thing, did you notice he was alone in his canoe?"

"What of it?"

"Shows he ain't noways popular with th' rest. Generally they pair off. There's mostly something shady about these renegades."

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing. Only we got to be careful."

CHAPTER SIX

Camp was made among the trees of an elevated bank above a small brook.

Already the Indian women had pitched the shelters, spreading squares of canvas, strips of birch-bark or tanned skins over roughly improvised lean-to poles. A half dozen tiny fires, too, they had built, over which some were at the moment engaged in hanging as many kettles. Several of the younger women were cleaning fish and threading them on switches. Others brought in the small twigs for fuel. Among them could be seen May-may-gwán, the young Ojibway girl, gliding here and there, eyes downcast, inexpressibly graceful in contrast with the Crees.

At once on landing the men took up their share of the work. Like the birds of the air and the beasts of the wood their first thoughts turned to the assurance of food. Two young fellows stretched a gill-net across the mouth of the creek. Others scattered in search of favourable spots in which to set the

musk-rat traps, to hang snares for rabbits and grouse.

Soon the camp took on the air of age, of long establishment, that is so suddenly to be won in the forest. The kettles began to bubble; the impaled fish to turn brown. A delicious odour of open-air cooking permeated the air. Men filled pipes and smoked in contemplation; children warmed themselves as near the tiny fires as they dared. Out of the dense blackness of the forest from time to time staggered what at first looked to be an uncouth and misshapen monster, but which presently resolved itself into an Indian leaning under a burden of spruce-boughs, so smoothly laid along the haft of a long forked stick that the bearer of the burden could sling it across his shoulder like a bale of hay. As he threw it to the ground, a delicate spice-like aroma disengaged itself to mingle with the smell of cooking. Just at the edge of camp sat the wolf-dogs, their yellow eyes gleaming, waiting in patience for their tardy share.

After the meal the women drew apart. Dick's eyes roved in vain, seeking a glimpse of the Ojibway girl. He was too familiar with Indian eti-

quette to make an advance, and in fact his interest was but languidly aroused.

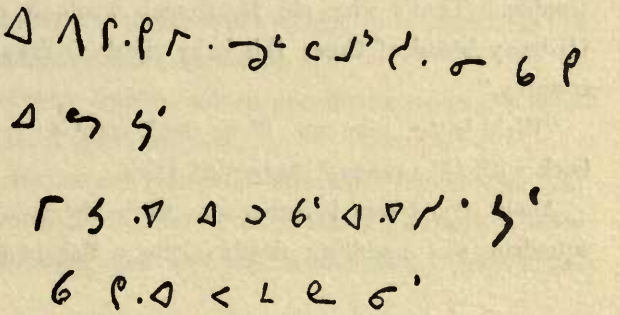
The men sat about the larger fire smoking It was the hour of relaxation. In the blaze their handsome or strong-lined brown faces lighted good-humouredly. They talked and laughed in low tones, the long syllables of their language lisping and hissing in strange analogy to the noises of the fire or the forest or the rapids or some other natural thing. Their speech was of the chances of the woods and the approaching visit to their Ojibway brothers in the south. For this they had brought their grand ceremonial robes of deerskin, now stowed securely in bags. The white men were silent. In a little while the pipes were finished. The camp was asleep. Through the ashes and the embers prowled the wolf-dogs, but half-fed, seeking scraps. Soon they took to the beach in search of cast-up fish. There they wandered all night long under the moon voicing their immemorial wrongs to the silenced forest.

Almost at first streak of dawn the women were abroad. Shortly after, the men visited their traps and lifted the nets. In this land and season of

plenty the catch had been good. The snares had strangled three hares; the steel traps had caught five musk-rats, which are very good eating in spite of their appearance; the net had intercepted a number of pickerel, suckers, and river whitefish. This, with the meat of the caribou, shot by Two-fingers the day before, and the supplies brought from the Post, made ample provision.

Nevertheless, when the camp had been struck and the canoes loaded, the order of march was reversed. Now the men took the lead by a good margin, and the women and children followed. For in the wooded country game drinks early.

Before setting out, however, old Haukemah blazed a fair clean place on a fir-tree, and with hard charcoal from the fire marked on it these characters:



"Can you read Injun writin'?" asked Dick. "I can't."

"Yes," replied Sam, "learned her when I was snowed up one winter with Scar-Face down by the Burwash Lake country." He squinted his eyes, reading the syllables slowly.

" 'Abichi-kā-menót Moosamík-kā-jā yank. Missowā edookan owāsi sek negi—' Why, it's Ojibway, not Cree," he exclaimed. "They're just leaving a record. 'Good journey from Moose Factory. Big game has been seen.' Funny how plumb curious an Injun is. They ain't one could come along here and see th' signs of this camp and rest easy 'till he'd figgered out how many they were, and where they were going, and what they were doing, and all about it. These records are a kind-hearted try to save other Injuns that come along a whole lot of trouble. That's why old Haukemah wrote it in Ojibway 'stead of Cree: this is by rights Ojibway country."

"We'd better pike out, if we don't want to get back with th' squaws," suggested Dick.

About two hours before noon, while the men's squadron was paddling slowly along a flat bank

overgrown with grass and bushes, Dick and Sam perceived a sudden excitement in the leading canoes. Haukemah stopped, then cautiously backed until well behind the screen of the point. The other canoes followed his example. In a moment they were all headed down stream, creeping along noiselessly without lifting their paddles from the water.

"They've seen some game beyant the point," whispered Dick. "Wonder what it is?"

But instead of pausing when out of earshot for the purpose of uncasing the guns or landing a stalking party, the Indians crept gradually from the shore, caught the current, and shot away down stream in the direction from which they had come.

"It's a bear," said Sam, quietly. "They've gone to get their war-paint on."

The men rested the bow of their canoe lightly against the shore, and waited. In a short time the Indian canoes reappeared.

"Say, they've surely got th' dry goods!" commented Dick, amused.

In the short interval that had elapsed, the Indians had intercepted their women, unpacked their baggage, and arrayed themselves in their finest

dress of ceremony. Buckskin elaborately embroidered with beads and silks in the flower pattern, ornaments of brass and silver, sacred skins of the beaver, broad dashes of ochre and vermilion on the naked skin, twisted streamers of coloured wool—all added to the barbaric gorgeousness of the old-time savage in his native state. Each bowsman carried a long brass-bound forty-five "trade-gun," warranted to kill up to ten yards.

"It's surely a nifty outfit!" commented Sam, half admiringly.

A half dozen of the younger men were landed. At once they disappeared in the underbrush. Although the two white men strained their keen senses they were unable to distinguish by sight or sound the progress of the party through the bushes.

"I guess they're hunters, all right," conceded Dick.

The other men waited like bronze statues. After a long interval a pine-warbler uttered its lisping note. Immediately the paddles dipped in the silent deer-stalker's stroke, and the cavalcade crept forward around the point.

Dick swept the shore with his eye, but saw noth-

ing. Then all heard plainly a half-smothered grunt of satisfaction, followed by a deep drawn breath. Phantom-like, without apparently the slightest directing motion, the bows of the canoes swung like wind-vanes to point toward a little heap of drift-logs under the shadow of an elder bush. The bear was wallowing in the cool, wet sand, and evidently enjoying it. A moment later he stuck his head over the pile of driftwood, and indulged in a leisurely survey of the river.

His eye was introspective, vacant, his mouth was half open, and his tongue lolled out so comically that Dick almost laughed aloud. No one moved by so much as a hand's breadth. The bear dropped back to his cooling sand with a sigh of voluptuous pleasure. The canoes drew a little nearer.

Now old Haukemah rose to his height in the bow of his canoe, and began to speak rapidly in a low voice. Immediately the animal bobbed into sight again, his wicked little eyes snapping with intelligence. It took him some moments to determine what these motionless, bright-coloured objects might be. Then he turned toward the land, but stopped short as his awakened senses brought him

the reek of the young men who had hemmed in his shoreward escape. He was not yet thoroughly alarmed, so stood there swaying uneasily back and forth, after the manner of bears, while Haukemah spoke swiftly in the soft Cree tongue.

"Oh, makwá, our little brother," he said, "we come to you not in anger, nor in disrespect. We come to do you a kindness. Here is hunger and cold and enemies. In the Afterland is only happiness. So if we shoot you, oh makwá, our little brother, be not angry with us."

He raised his trade-gun and pulled the trigger. A scattering volley broke from the other canoes and from the young men concealed in the bushes.

Now a trade-gun is a gun meant to trade. It is a section of what looks to be gas-pipe, bound by brass bands to a long, clumsy, wooden stick that extends within an inch of the end of the barrel. It is supposed to shoot ball or shot. As a matter of fact the marksman's success depends more on his luck than his skill. Were it not for the Woods-Indian's extraordinary powers of still-hunting so that he can generally approach very near to his game, his success would be small indeed.

With the shock of a dozen little bullets the bear went down, snarling and biting and scattering the sand, but was immediately afoot again. A black bear is not a particularly dangerous beast in ordinary circumstances—but occasionally he contributes quite a surprise to the experience of those who encounter him. This bear was badly wounded and cruelly frightened. His keen sense of smell informed him that the bushes contained enemies —how many he did not know, but they were concealed, unknown, and therefore dreadful. In front of him was something definite. Before the astonished Indians could back water, he had dashed into the shallows, and planted his paws on the bow of old Haukemah's canoe.

A simultaneous cry of alarm burst from the other Indians. Some began frantically to recharge their muzzle-loading trade-guns; others dashed toward the spot as rapidly as paddle or moccasin could bring them. Haukemah himself roused valiantly to the defence, but was promptly upset and pounced upon by the enraged animal. A smother of spray enveloped the scene. Dick Herron rose suddenly to his feet and shot. The bear collapsed into the

muddied water, his head doubled under, a thin stream of arterial blood stringing away down the current. Haukemah and his steersman rose dripping. A short pause of silence ensued.

"Well, you are a wonder!" ejaculated Sam Bolton at last. "How in thunder did you do that? I couldn't make nothing out of *that* tangle—at least nothing clear enough to shoot at!"

"Luck," replied Dick, briefly. "I took a snap shot, and happened to make it."

"You ran mighty big chances of winning old Haukemah," objected Sam.

"Sure! But I didn't," answered Dick, conclusively.

The Indians gathered to examine in respectful admiration. Dick's bullet had passed from ear to ear. To them it was wonderful shooting, as indeed it would have been had it indicated anything but the most reckless luck. Haukemah was somewhat disgusted at the wetting of his finery, but the bear is a sacred animal, and even ceremonial dress and an explanation of the motives that demanded his death might not be sufficient to appease his divinity. The women's squadron appeared about

the bend, and added their cries of rejoicing to those of their husbands and brothers.

The beautiful buckskin garments were hastily exchanged for ordinary apparel. By dint of much wading, tugging, and rolling the carcass was teased to the dry beach. There the body was securely anchored by the paws to small trees, and the work of skinning and butchering began.

Not a shred was wasted. Whatever flesh would not be consumed within a few days they cut into very thin strips and hung across poles to dry. Scraps went to the dogs, who were for once well fed. Three of the older squaws went to work with bone scrapers to tan the hide. In this season, while the fur was not as long as it would be later, it was fine and new. The other squaws pitched camp. No right-minded Indian would dream of travelling further with such a feast in prospect.

While these things were preparing, the older men cleaned and washed the bear's skull very carefully. Then they cut a tall pole, on the end of which they fastened the skull, and finished by planting the whole affair securely near the running water. When the skull should have remained there

for the space of twelve moons, the sacred spirit of the departed beast would be appeased. For that reason Haukemah would not here leave his customary hieroglyphic record when he should break camp. If an enemy should happen along, he could do harm to Haukemah simply by overturning the trophy, whereas an unidentified skull might belong to a friend, and so would be let alone on the chance. For that reason, too, when they broke camp the following day, the expert trailers took pains to obliterate the more characteristic indications of their stay.

Now abruptly the weather changed. The sky became overcast with low, gray clouds hurrying from the northwest. It grew cold. After a few hours of indecision it began to rain, dashing the chill water in savage gusts. Amidships in each canoe the household goods were protected carefully by means of the wigwam covers, but the people themselves sat patiently, exposed to the force of the storm. Water streamed from their hair, over their high cheeks, to drip upon their already sodden clothing. The buckskin of their moccasins sucked water like so many sponges. They stepped indif-

ferently in and out of the river,—for as to their legs, necessarily much exposed, they could get no wetter—and it was very cold. Whenever they landed the grass and bushes completed the soaking. By night each and every member of the band, including the two white men, were as wet as though they had plunged over-head in the stream. Only there was this difference: river-water could have been warmed gradually by the contact of woolen clothes with the body, but the chill of rain-water was constantly renewed.

Nor was there much comfort in the prospect when, weary and cold, they finally drew their canoes ashore for the evening's camp. The forest was dripping, the ground soggy, each separate twig and branch cold and slippery to the hand. The accumulated water of a day showered down at the slightest movement. A damp wind seemed to rise from the earth itself.

Half measures or timid shrinkings would not do. Every one had to plunge boldly into the woods, had to seize and drag forth, at whatever cost of shower-bath the wilderness might levy, all the dead wood he could find. Then the value of the birch-bark envel-

ope about the powdery touch-wood became evident. The fire, at first small and steamy, grew each instant. Soon a dozen little blazes sprang up, only to be extinguished as soon as they had partially dried the site of wigwams. Hot tea was swallowed gratefully, duffel hung before the flames. Nobody dried completely, but everybody steamed, and even in the pouring rain this little warmth was comfort by force of contrast. The sleeping blankets were damp, the clothes were damp, the ground was damp, the air was damp; but, after all, discomfort is a little thing and a temporary, and can be borne. In the retrospect it is nothing at all. Such is the Indian's philosophy, and that is why in a rain he generally travels instead of lying in camp.

The storm lasted four days. Then the wind shifted to the north, bringing clearing skies.

Up to now the river had been swift in places, but always by dint of tracking or poling the canoes had been forced against the quick water. Early one forenoon, however, Haukemah lifted carefully the bow of his canoe and slid it up the bank.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The portage struck promptly to the right through a tall, leafy woods, swam neck-high in the foliage of small growth, mounted a steep hill, and meandered over a bowlder-strewn, moss-grown plateau, to dip again, a quarter of a mile away, to the banks of the river. But you must not imagine one of your easy portages of Maine or lower Canada. This trail was faint and dim,—here an excoriation on the surface of a fallen and half-rotted tree, there a withered limb hanging, again a mere *sense* in the forest's growth that others had passed that way. Only an expert could have followed it.

The canoe loads were dumped out on the beach. One after another, even to the little children, the people shouldered their packs. The long sash was knotted into a loop, which was passed around the pack and the bearer's forehead. Some of the stronger men carried thus upward of two hundred pounds.

Unlike a party of white men, the Indians put no system into their work. They rested when they pleased, chatted, shouted, squatted on their heels conversing. Yet somehow the task was accomplished, and quickly. To one on an elevation dominating the scene it would have been most picturesque. Especially noticeable were those who for the moment stood idle, generally on heights, where their muscle-loose attitudes and fluttering draperies added a strangely decorative note to the landscape; while below plodded, bending forward under their enormous loads, an unending procession of patient toilers. In five minutes the portage was alive from one end to the other.

To Dick and Sam Bolton the traverse was a simple matter. Sam, by the aid of his voyager's sash, easily carried the supplies and blankets; Dick fastened the two paddles across the thwarts to form a neck-yoke, and swung off with the canoe. Then they returned to the plateau until their savage friends should have finished the crossing.

Ordinarily white men of this class are welcome enough to travel with the Indian tribes. Their presence is hardly considered extraordinary enough

for comment. Sam Bolton, however, knew that in the present instance he and Dick aroused an unusual interest of some sort.

He was not able to place it to his own satisfaction. It might be because of Bolton's reputation as a woodsman; it might be because of Dick Herron's spectacular service to Haukemah in the instance of the bear; it might be that careful talk had not had its due effect in convincing the Indians that the journey looked merely to the establishment of new winter posts; Sam was not disinclined to attribute it to pernicious activity on the part of the Ojibway. It might spring from any one of these. Nor could he quite decide its quality;—whether friendly or inimical. Merely persisted the fact that he and his companion were watched curiously by the men and fearfully by the women; that they brought a certain constraint to the camp fire.

Finally an incident, though it did not decide these points, brought their ambiguity nearer to the surface.

One evening old Haukemah received from the women the bear's robe fully tanned. Its inner sur-

face had been whitened and then painted rudely with a symbolical representation of the hunt. Haukemah spoke as follows, holding the robe in his hand:

"This is the robe of makwá, our little brother. His flesh we all ate of. But you who killed him should have his coat. Therefore my women have painted it because you saved their head man."

He laid the robe at Dick's feet. Dick glanced toward his companion with the strange cast flickering quizzically in his narrow eyes. "Fine thing to carry along on a trip like ours," he said in English. "*I* don't know what to do with it. They've worked on it mighty near a week. I wish to hell they'd keep their old robe." However, he stopped and touched it in sign of acceptance. "I thank my brother," he said in Cree.

"You'll have to bring it along," Sam answered in English. "We'll have to carry it while we're with them, anyway."

The Indian men were squatted on their heels about the fire, waiting gravely and courteously for this conference, in an unknown tongue, to come to an end. The women, naturally interested in the dis-

posal of their handiwork, had drawn just within the circle of light.

Suddenly Dick, inspired, darted to this group of women, whence he returned presently half dragging, half-coaxing a young girl. She came reluctantly, hanging back a little, dropping her head, or with an embarrassed giggle glancing shyly over her shoulder at her companions. When near the centre of the men's group, Dick dropped her hand.

Promptly she made as though to escape, but stopped at a word from Haukemah. It was May-may-gwán, the Ojibway girl.

Obediently she paused. Her eyes were dancing with the excitement of the adventure, an almost roguish smile curved her mouth and dimpled her cheek, her lower lip was tightly clasped between her teeth as she stood contemplating her heavily beaded little moccasin, awaiting the explanation of this, to her, extraordinary performance.

"What is your name, little sister?" asked Dick in Cree.

She dropped her head lower, but glanced from the corner of her eye at the questioner.

"Answer!" commanded Haukemah.

"May-may-gwán," she replied in a low voice.

"Oh, yes," said Dick, in English. "You're an Ojibway," he went on in Cree.

"Yes."

"That explains why you're such a tearing little beauty," muttered the young man, again in English.

"The old-men," he resumed, in Cree, "have given me this robe. Because I hold it very dear I wish to give it to that people whom I hold dearest. That people is the Crees of Rupert's House. And because you are the fairest, I give you this robe so that there may be peace between your people and me."

Ill-expressed as this little speech was, from the flowery standpoint of Indian etiquette, nevertheless its subtlety gained applause. The Indians grunted deep ejaculations of pleasure. "Good boy!" muttered Sam Bolton, pleased.

Dick lifted the robe and touched it to the girl's hand. She gasped in surprise, then slowly raised her eyes to his.

"Damn if you ain't pretty enough to kiss!" cried Dick.

He stepped across the robe, which had fallen between them, circled the girl's upturned face with the flat of his hands, and kissed her full on the lips.

The kiss of ceremony is not unknown to the northern Indians, and even the kiss of affection sometimes to be observed among the more demonstrative, but such a caress as Dick bestowed on May-may-gwán filled them with astonishment. The girl herself, though she cried out, and ran to hide among those of her own sex, was not displeased; she rather liked it, and could not mis-read the admiration that had prompted it. Nor did the other Indians really object. It was a strange thing to do, but perhaps it was a white man's custom. The affair might have blown away like a puff of gunpowder.

But at the moment of Dick's salute, Sam Bolton cried out sharply behind him. The young woodsman instantly whirled to confront the Chippewa.

"He reached for his knife," explained Sam.

The ejaculation had also called the attention of every member of the band to the tableau. There could be absolutely no doubt as to its meaning,—

the evident anger of the red, his attitude, his hand on the haft of his knife. The Chippewa was fairly caught.

He realised the fact, but his quick mind instantly turned the situation to his profit. Without attempting to alter the malice of his expression, he nevertheless dropped his hand from his knife-hilt, and straightened his figure to the grandiose attitude of the Indian orator.

"This man speaks crooked words. I know the language of the saganash. He tells my brothers that he gives this robe to May-may-gwán because he holds it the dearest of his possessions, and because his heart is good towards my brother's people. But to the other saganash he said these words: 'It is a little thing, and I do not wish to carry it. What shall I do with it?' "

He folded his arms theatrically. Dick Herron, his narrow eyes blazing, struck him full on the mouth a shoulder blow that sent him sprawling into the ashes by the fire.

The Chippewa was immediately on his feet, his knife in his hand. Instinctively the younger Crees drew near to him. The old race antagonism flashed

forth, naturally, without the intervention of reason. A murmur went up from the other bystanders.

Sam Bolton arose quietly to take his place at Dick's elbow. As yet there was no danger of violence, except from the outraged Chippewa. The Crees were startled, but they had not yet taken sides. All depended on an intrepid front. For a moment they stared at one another, the Indians uncertain, the Anglo-Saxons, as always, fiercely dominant in spirit, no matter what the odds against them, as long as they are opposed to what they consider the inferior race.

Then a flying figure glided to the two. May-may-gwán, palpitating with fear, thrust their rifles into the white men's hands, then took her stand behind them.

But Haukemah interfered with all the weight of his authority.

"Stop!" he commanded, sharply. "There is no need that friends should bear weapons. What are you doing, my young men? Do you judge these saganash without hearing what they have to say? Ask of them if what the Chippewa says is true."

"The robe is fine. I gave it for the reason I said," replied Dick.

The Cree young men, shaken from their instinctive opposition, sank back. It was none of their affair, after all, but a question of veracity between Dick and his enemy. And the Chippewa enjoyed none too good a reputation. The swift crisis had passed.

Dick laughed his boyish, reckless laugh.

"Damn if I didn't pick out the old idiot's best girl!" he cried to his companion; but the latter doubtfully shook his head.

CHAPTER EIGHT

When next day the band resumed the journey, it became evident that May-may-gwán was to be punished for her demonstration of the night before. Her place in the bow of old Moose Cow's canoe was taken by a little girl, and she was left to follow as best she might on foot.

The travel ashore was exceedingly difficult. A dense forest growth of cedar and tamarack pushed to the very edge of the water, and the rare open beaches were composed of smooth rocks too small to afford secure footing, and too large to be trodden under. The girl either slipped and stumbled on insecure and ankle-twisting shale, or forced a way through the awful tangle of a swamp. As the canoeing at this point was not at all difficult, her utmost efforts could not keep her abreast of the travellers.

Truth to tell May-may-gwán herself did not appear to consider that she was hardly used. Indeed

she let her hair down about her face, took off the brilliant bits of color that had adorned her garments, and assumed the regulation downcast attitude of a penitent. But Dick Herron was indignant.

"Look here, Sam," said he, "this thing ain't right at all. She got into all this trouble on our account, and we're riding canoe here slick as carcajou in a pork cache while she pegs along afoot. Let's take her aboard."

"Won't do," replied Sam, briefly, "can't interfere. Let those Injuns run themselves. They're more or less down on us as it is."

"Oh, you're too slow!" objected Dick. "What the hell do we care for a lot of copper-skins from Rupert's House! We ain't got anything to ask from them but a few pairs of moccasins, and if they don't want to make them for us, they can use their buckskin to tie up their sore heads!"

He thrust his paddle in close to the bow and twisted the canoe towards shore.

"Come on, Sam," said he, "show your spunk!"

The older man said nothing. His steady blue eyes rested on his companion's back not un-

kindly, although a frown knit the brows above them.

"Come here, little sister," cried Dick to the girl.

She picked her way painfully through the scrub to the edge of the bank.

"Get into the canoe," commanded Dick.

She drew back in deprecation.

"Ka'-ka'win!" she objected, in very real terror. "The old-men have commanded that I take the Long Way, and who am I that I should not obey? It cannot be."

"Get in here," ordered Dick, obstinately.

"My brother is good to me, but I cannot, for the head men have ordered. It would go very hard with me, if I should disobey."

"Oh, hell!" exploded petulant Dick in English, slamming his paddle down against the thwarts.

He leaped ashore, picked the girl up bodily, threw her almost with violence into the canoe, thrust the light craft into the stream, and resumed his efforts, scowling savagely.

The girl dropped her face in her hands. When the white men's craft overtook the main band, she crouched still lower, shuddering under the grim

scrutiny of her people. Dick's lofty scorn looked neither to right nor left, but paddled fiercely ahead until the Indians were well astern and hidden by the twists of the river. Sam Bolton proceeded serenely on in his accustomed way.

Only, when the tribesmen had been left behind, he leaned forward and began to talk to the girl in low-voiced Ojibway, comforting her with many assurances, as one would comfort a child. After a time she ceased trembling and looked up. But her glance made no account of the steady, old man who had so gently led her from her slough of despond, but rested on the straight, indignant back of the glorious youth who had cast her into it. And Sam Bolton, knowing the ways of a maid, merely sighed and resumed his methodical paddling.

At the noon stop and on portage it was impossible to gauge the feeling of the savages in regard to the matter, but at night the sentiment was strongly enough marked. May-may-gwán herself, much to her surprise, was no further censured, and was permitted to escape with merely the slights and sneers the women were able to inflict on her. Perhaps her masters, possessed of an accurate sense of justice,

realised that the latter affair had not been her fault. Or, what is more likely, their race antagonism, always ready in these fierce men of the Silent Places, seized instinctively on this excuse to burst into a definite unfriendliness. The younger men drew frankly apart. The older made it a point to sit by the white men's fire, but they conversed formally and with many pauses. Day by day the feeling intensified. A strong wind had followed from the north for nearly a week, and so, of course, they had seen no big game, for the wary animals scented them long before they came in sight. Meat began to run low. So large a community could not subsist on the nightly spoils of the net and traps. The continued ill-luck was attributed to the visitors. Finally camp was made for a day while Crooked Nose, the best trailer and hunter of them all, went out to get a caribou. Dick, hoping thus to win a little good will, lent his Winchester for the occasion.

The Indian walked very carefully through the mossy woods until he came upon a caribou trail still comparatively fresh. Nobody but Crooked Nose could have followed the faint indications, but he did so, at first rapidly, then more warily, finally at

a very snail's pace. His progress was noiseless. Such a difficult result was accomplished primarily by his quickness of eye in selecting the spots on which to place his feet, and also to a great extent by the fact that he held his muscles so pliantly tense that the weight of his body came down not all at once, but in increasing pressure until the whole was supported ready for the next step. He *flowed* through the woods.

When the trail became fresh he often paused to scrutinise closely, to smell, even to taste the herbage broken by the animal's hoofs. Once he startled a jay, but froze into immobility before that watchman of the woods had sprung his alarm. For full ten minutes the savage poised motionless. Then the bird flitted away, and he resumed his careful stalk.

It was already nearly noon. The caribou had been feeding slowly forward. Now he would lie down. And Crooked Nose knew very well that the animal would make a little detour to right or left so as to be able to watch his back track.

Crooked Nose redoubled his scrutiny of the broken herbage. Soon he left the trail, moving like a spirit, noiselessly, steadily, but so slowly that

it would have required a somewhat extended observation to convince you that he moved at all. His bead-like black eyes roved here and there. He did not look for a caribou—no such fool he—but for a splotch of brown, a deepening of shadow, a contour of surface which long experience had taught him could not be due to the forest's ordinary play of light and shade. After a moment his gaze centred. In the lucent, cool, green shadow of a thick clump of moose maples he felt rather than discerned a certain warmth of tone. You and I would probably have missed the entire shadow. But Crooked Nose knew that the warmth of tone meant the brown of his quarry's summer coat. He cocked his rifle.

But a caribou is a large animal, and only a few spots are fatal. Crooked Nose knew better than to shoot at random. He whistled.

The dark colour dissolved. There were no abrupt movements, no noises, but suddenly the caribou seemed to develop from the green shadow mist, to stand, his ears pricked forward, his lustrous eyes wide, his nostrils quivering toward the unknown something that had uttered the sound. It

was like magic. An animal was now where, a moment before, none had been.

Crooked Nose raised the rifle, sighted steadily at the shoulder, low down, and pulled the trigger. A sharp *click* alone answered his intention. Accustomed only to the old trade-gun, he had neglected to throw down and back the lever which should lift the cartridge from the magazine.

Instantly the caribou snorted aloud and crashed noisily away. A dozen lurking Canada jays jumped to the tops of spruces and began to scream. Red squirrels, in all directions, alternately whirred their rattles and chattered in an ecstasy of rage. The forest was alarmed.

Crooked Nose glanced at the westering sun, and set out swiftly in a direct line for the camp of his companions. Arrived there he marched theatrically to the white men, cast the borrowed rifle at their feet, and returned to the side of the fire, where he squatted impassively on his heels. The hunt had failed.

All the rest of the afternoon the men talked sullenly together. There could be no doubt that trouble was afoot. Toward night some of the

younger members grew so bold as to cast fierce looks in the direction of the white visitors.

Finally late in the evening old Haukemah came to them. For some time he sat silent and grave, smoking his pipe, and staring solemnly into the coals.

"Little Father," said he at last, "you and I are old men. Our blood is cool. We do not act quickly. But other men are young. Their blood is hot and swift, and it is quick to bring them spirit-thoughts.* They say you have made the wind, kee-way-din, the north wind, to blow so that we can have no game. They say you conjured Crooked Nose so that he brought back no caribou, although he came very near it. They say, too, that you seek a red man to do him a harm, and their hearts are evil toward you on that account. They say you have made the power of the old-men as nothing, for what they commanded you denied when you brought our little sister in your canoe. I know nothing of these things, except the last, which was foolishness in the doing," the old man glanced sharply at Dick, puffed on his nearly extinguished pipe until it was

* Fancies.

well alight, and went on. "My brothers say they are looking places for winter posts; I believe them. They say their hearts are kind toward my people; I believe them. Kee-way-din, the north wind, has many times before blown up the river, and Crooked Nose is a fool. My heart is good toward you, but it is not the heart of my young men. They murmur and threaten. Here our trails fork. My brothers must go now their own way."

"Good," replied Sam, after a moment. "I am glad my brother's heart is good toward me, and I know what young men are. We will go. Tell your young men."

An expression of relief overspread Haukemah's face. Evidently the crisis had been more grave than he had acknowledged. He thrust his hand inside his loose capote and brought forth a small bundle.

"Moccasins," said he.

Sam looked them over. They were serviceable, strong deerskin, with high tops of white linen cloth procured at the Factory, without decoration save for a slender line of silk about the tongue. Something approaching a smile flickered over old Hau-

kemah's countenance as he fished out of his side pocket another pair.

"For Eagle-eye," he said, handing them to Dick. The young man had gained the sobriquet, not because of any remarkable clarity of vision, but from the peculiar aquiline effect of his narrow gaze.

The body of the moccasins were made of buckskin as soft as silk, smoked to a rich umber. The tops were of fawnskin, tanned to milky white. Where the two parts joined, the edges had been allowed to fall half over the foot in an exaggerated welt, lined brilliantly with scarlet silk. The ornamentation was heavy and elaborate. Such moccasins often consume, in the fashioning, the idle hours of months. The Indian girl carries them with her everywhere, as her more civilised sister carries an embroidery frame. On dress occasions in the Far North a man's standing with his womenkind can be accurately gauged by the magnificence of his foot-gear.

"The gift of May-may-gwán," explained Haukemah.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Dick, in English.

"Will my brother be paid in tea or in tobacco?" inquired Sam Bolton.

Haukemah arose.

"Let these remind you always that my heart is good," said he. "I may tell my young men that you go?"

"Yes. We are grateful for these."

"Old fellow's a pretty decent sort," remarked Dick, after Haukemah had stalked away.

"There couldn't anything have happened better for us!" cried Sam. "Here I was wondering how we could get away. It wouldn't do to travel with them much longer, and it wouldn't do to quit them without a good reason. I'm mighty relieved to get shut of them. The best way over into the Kabinakágam is by way of a little creek the Injuns call the Mattawishguia, and that ought to be a few hours ahead of us now." He might have added that all these annoyances, which he was so carefully discounting, had sprung from Dick's thoughtlessness; but he was silent, sure of the young man's value when the field of his usefulness should be reached.

CHAPTER NINE

Dick Herron and Sam Bolton sat on the trunk of a fallen tree. It was dim morning. Through the haze that shrouded the river figures moved. Occasionally a sharp sound eddied the motionless silence —a paddle dropped, the prow of a canoe splashed as it was lifted to the water, the tame crow uttered a squawk. Little by little the groups dwindled. Invisible canoes were setting out, beyond the limits of vision. Soon there remained but a few scattered, cowled figures, the last women hastily loading their craft that they might not be left behind. Now these, too, thrust through the gray curtain of fog. The white men were alone.

With the passing of the multitude once again the North came close. Spying on the deserted camp an hundred smaller woods creatures fearfully approached, bright-eyed, alert, ready to retreat, but eager to investigate for scraps of food that might have been left. Squirrels poised in spruce-trees,

leaped boldly through space, or hurried across little open stretches of ground. Meat-hawks, their fluffy plumage smoothed to alertness, swooped here and there. Momentary and hasty scurryings in the dead leaves attested the presence of other animals, faint chirpings and rustlings the presence of other birds, following these their most courageous foragers. In a day the Indian camp would have taken on the character of the forest; in a month, an ancient ruin, it would have fitted as accurately with its surroundings as an acorn in the cup.

Now the twisted vapours drained from among the tree-trunks into the river bed, where it lay, not more than five feet deep, accurately marking the course of the stream. The sun struck across the tops of the trees. A chickadee, upside down in bright-eyed contemplation, uttered two flute-notes. Instantly a winter-wren, as though at a signal, went into ecstatic ravings. The North was up and about her daily business.

Sam Bolton and Dick finally got under way. After an hour they arrived opposite the mouth of a tributary stream. This Sam announced as the Mattawishguia. Immediately they turned to it.

The Mattawishguia would be variously described; in California as a river, in New England as a brook, in Superior country as a trout stream. It is an hundred feet wide, full of rapids, almost all fast water, and, except in a few still pools, from a foot to two feet deep. The bottom is of round stones.

Travel by canoe in such a stream is a farce. The water is too fast to pole against successfully more than half the time; the banks are too overgrown for tracking with the tow-line. About the only system is to get there in the best way possible. Usually this meant that Dick waded at the bow and Sam at the stern, leaning strongly against the current. Bowlders of all sorts harassed the free passage, stones rolled under the feet, holes of striking unexpectedness lay in wait, and the water was icy cold. Once in a while they were able to paddle a few hundred feet. Then both usually sat astride the ends of the canoe, their legs hanging in the water in order that the drippings might not fall inside. As this was the early summer, they occasionally kicked against trees to drive enough of the numbness from their legs so that they could feel the bottom.

It was hard work and cold work and wearing, for it demanded its exact toll for each mile, and was as insistent for the effort at weary night as at fresh morning.

Dick, in the vigour of his young strength, seemed to like it. The leisure of travel with the Indians had barely stretched his muscles. Here was something against which he could exert his utmost force. He rejoiced in it, taking great lungfuls of air, bending his shoulders, breaking through these outer defences of the North with wanton exuberance, blind to everything, deaf to everything, oblivious of all other mental and physical sensations except the delight of applying his skill and strength to the subduing of the stream.

But Sam, patient, uncomplaining, enduring, retained still the broader outlook. He, too, fought the water and the cold, adequately and strongly, but it was with the unconsciousness of long habit. His mind recognised the Forest as well as the Stream. The great physical thrill over the poise between perfect health and the opposing of difficulties he had left behind him with his youth; as indeed he had, in a lesser sense, gained with his age an

indifference to discomfort. He was cognisant of the stillness of the woods, the presence of the birds and beasts, the thousand subtleties that make up the personality of the great forest.

And with the strange sixth sense of the accustomed woodsman Sam felt, as they travelled, that something was wrong. The impression did not come to him through any of the accustomed channels. In fact, it hardly reached his intellect as yet. Through long years his intuitions had adapted themselves to their environment. The subtle influences the forest always disengaged found in the delicately attuned fibres of his being that which vibrated in unison with them. Now this adjustment was in some way disturbed. To Sam Bolton the forest was *different*, and this made him uneasy without his knowing why. From time to time he stopped suddenly, every nerve quivering, his nostrils wide, like some wild thing alert for danger. And always the other five senses, on which his mind depended, denied the sixth. Nothing stirred but the creatures of the wilderness.

Yet always the impression persisted. It was easily put to flight, and yet it always returned.

Twice, while Dick rested in the comfort of tobacco, Sam made long detours back through the woods, looking for something, he knew not what; uneasy, he knew not why. Always he found the forest empty. Everything, well ordered, was in its accustomed place. He returned to the canoe, shaking his head, unable to rid himself of the sensation of something foreign to the established order of things.

At noon the men drew ashore on a little point of rock. There they boiled tea over a small fire, and ate the last of their pilot's bread, together with bacon and the cold meat of partridges. By now the sun was high and the air warm. Tepid odours breathed from the forest, and the songs of familiar homely birds. Little heated breezes puffed against the travellers' cheeks. In the sun's rays their garments steamed and their muscles limbered.

Yet even here Sam Bolton was unable to share the relaxation of mind and body his companion so absolutely enjoyed. Twice he paused, food suspended, his mouth open, to listen intently for a moment, then to finish carrying his hand to his mouth with the groping of vague perplexity. Once he arose to another of his purposeless circles through

the woods. Dick paid no attention to these things. In the face of danger his faculties would be as keenly on the stretch as his comrade's; but now, the question one merely of difficult travel, the responsibility delegated to another, he bothered his head not at all, but like a good lieutenant left everything to his captain, half closed his eyes, and watched the smoke curl from his brier pipe.

When evening fell the little fish-net was stretched below a chute of water, the traps set, snares laid. As long as these means sufficed for a food supply, the ammunition would be saved. Wet clothes were hung at a respectful distance from the blaze.

Sam was up and down all night, uncomfortable, indefinitely groping for the influence that unsettled his peace of mind. The ghost shadows in the pines; the pattering of mysterious feet; the cries, loud and distant, or faint and near; the whisperings, whistlings, sighings, or crashes; all the thousand ethereal essences of day-time noises that go to make up the Night and her silences—these he knew. What he did not know, could not understand, was within himself. What he sought was that thing in Nature which should correspond.

The next day at noon he returned to Dick after a more than usually long excursion, carrying some object. He laid it before his companion. The object proved to be a flat stone; and on the flat stone was the wet print of a moccasin.

"We're followed," he said, briefly.

Dick seized the stone and examined it closely.

"It's too blurred," he said, at last; "I can't make it out. But th' man who made that track wasn't far off. Couldn't you make trail of him? He must have been between you an' me when you found this rock."

"No," Sam demurred, "he wasn't. This moccasin was pointed down stream. He heard me, and went right on down with th' current. He's sticking to the water all the way so as to leave no trail."

"No use trying to follow an Injun who knows you're after him," agreed Dick.

"It's that Chippewa, of course," proffered Sam. "I always was doubtful of him. Now he's followin' us to see what we're up to. Then, he ain't any too friendly to you, Dick, 'count of that scrap and th' girl. But I don't think that's what he's up to—not yet, at least. I believe he's some sort of friend or

kin of that Jingoss, an' he wants to make sure that we're after him."

"Why don't he just ambush us, then, an' be done with it?" asked Dick.

"Two to one," surmised Bolton, laconically. "He's only got a trade-gun—one shot. But more likely he thinks it ain't going to do him much good to lay us out. More men would be sent. If th' Company's really after Jingoss, the only safe thing for him is a warning. But his friend don't want to get him out of th' country on a false alarm."

"That's so," said Dick.

They talked over the situation, and what was best to be done.

"He don't know yet that we've discovered him," submitted Sam. "My scouting around looked like huntin', and he couldn't a seen me pick up that stone. We better not try to catch him till we can make *sure*. He's got to camp somewheres. We'll wait till night. Of course he'll get away from th' stream, and he'll cover his trail. Still, they's a moon. I don't believe anybody could do it but you, Dick. If you don't make her, why there ain't nothing lost. We'll just have to camp down here

an' go to trapping until he gets sick of hanging around."

So it was agreed. Dick, under stress of danger, was now a changed man. What he lacked in experience and the power to synthesise, he more than made up in the perfection of his senses and a certain natural instinct of the woods. He was a better trailer than Sam, his eyesight was keener, his hearing more acute, his sense of smell finer, his every nerve alive and tingling in vibrant unison with the life about him. Where Sam laboriously arrived by the aid of his forty years' knowledge, the younger man leaped by the swift indirection of an Indian —or a woman. Had he only possessed, as did Bolton, a keen brain as well as keen higher instincts, he would have been marvellous.

The old man sat near the camp-fire after dark that night sure that Herron was even then conducting the affair better than he could have done himself. He had confidence. No faintest indication,—even in the uncertainty of moonlight through the trees,—that a man had left the river would escape the young man's minute inspection. And in the search no twig would snap under those soft-moc-

casined feet; no betraying motion of brush or brake warn the man he sought. Dick's woodcraft of that sort was absolute; just as Sam Bolton's woodcraft also was absolute—of its sort. It might be long, but the result was certain,—unless the Indian himself suspected.

Dick had taken his rifle.

"You know," Sam reminded him, significantly, "we don't really need that Injun."

"I know," Dick had replied, grimly.

Now Sam Bolton sat near the fire waiting for the sound of a shot. From time to time he spread his gnarled, carved-mahogany hands to the blaze. Under his narrow hat his kindly gray-blue eyes, wrinkled at the corners with speculation and good humour, gazed unblinking into the light. As always he smoked.

Time went on. The moon climbed, then descended again. Finally it shone almost horizontally through the tree-trunks, growing larger and larger until its field was crackled across with a frostwork of twigs and leaves. By and by it reached the edge of a hill-bank, visible through an opening, and paused. It had become huge, gigantic, big with

mystery. A wolf sat directly before it, silhouetted sharply. Presently he raised his pointed nose, howling mournfully across the waste.

The fire died down to coals. Sam piled on fresh wood. It hissed spitefully, smoked voluminously, then leaped into flame. The old woodsman sat as though carved from patience, waiting calmly the issue.

Then through the shadows, dancing ever more gigantic as they became more distant, Sam Bolton caught the solidity of something moving. The object was as yet indefinite, mysterious, flashing momentarily into view and into eclipse as the tree-trunks intervened or the shadows flickered. The woodsman did not stir; only his eyes narrowed with attention. Then a branch snapped, noisy, carelessly broken. Sam's expectancy flagged. Whoever it was did not care to hide his approach.

But in a moment the watcher could make out that the figures were two; one erect and dominant, the other stooping in surrender. Sam could not understand. A prisoner would be awkward. But he waited without a motion, without apparent interest, in the indifferent attitude of the woods-runner.

Now the two neared the outer circle of light; they stepped within it; they stopped at the fire's edge. Sam Bolton looked up straight into the face of Dick's prisoner.

It was May-may-gwán, the Ojibway girl.

CHAPTER TEN

Dick pulled the girl roughly to the fireside, where he dropped her arm, leaving her downcast and submissive. He was angry all through with the powerless rage of the man whose attentions a woman has taken more seriously than he had intended. Suddenly he was involved more deeply than he had meant.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he cried.

"What you doing here?" asked Sam in Ojibway, although he knew what the answer would be.

She did not reply, however.

"Hell!" burst out Dick.

"Well, keep your hair on," advised Sam Bolton, with a grin. "You shouldn't be so attractive, Dicky."

The latter growled.

"Now you've got her, what you going to do with her?" pursued the older man.

"Do with her?" exploded Dick; "what in hell do you mean? I don't want her; she's none of my funeral. She's got to go back, of course."

"Oh, sure!" agreed Sam. "She's got to go back. Sure thing! It's only two days down stream, and then the Crees would have only four days' start and getting farther every minute. A mere ten days in the woods without an outfit. Too easy; especially for a woman. But of course you'll give her your outfit, Dick."

He mused, gazing into the flames, his eyes droll over this new complication introduced by his thoughtless comrade.

"Well, we can't have her with us," objected Dick, obstinately. "She'd hinder us, and bother us, and get in our way, and we'd have to feed her—we may have to starve ourselves;—and she's no damn *use* to us. She can't go. I won't have it; I didn't bargain to lug a lot of squaws around on this trip. She came; I didn't ask her to. Let her get out of it the best way she can. She's an Injun. She can make it all right through the woods. And if she has a hard time, she *ought* to."

"Nice mess, isn't it, Dick?" grinned the other.

"No mess about it. I haven't anything to do with such a fool trick. What did she expect to gain tagging us through the woods that way half a mile to the rear? She was just waiting 'till we got so far away from th' Crees that we couldn't send her back. I'll fool her on that, damn her!" He kicked a log back into place, sending the sparks eddying.

"I wonder if she's had anything to eat lately?" said Bolton.

"I don't care a damn whether she has or not," said Dick.

"Keep your hair on, my son," advised Sam again. "You're hot because you thought you'd got shut of th' whole affair, and now you find you haven't."

"You make me sick," commented Dick.

"Mebbe," admitted the woodsman. He fell silent, staring straight before him, emitting short puffs from his pipe. The girl stood where she had been thrust.

"I'll start her back in the morning," proffered Dick after a few moments. Then, as this elicited no remark, "We can stock her up with jerky, and there's no reason she shouldn't make it." Sam remained grimly silent. "Is there?" insisted Dick.

He waited a minute for a reply. Then, as none came, "Hell!" he exclaimed, disgustedly, and turned away to sit on a log the other side of the fire with all the petulance of a child.

"Now look here, Sam," he broke out, after an interval. "We might as well get at this thing straight. We can't keep her with us, now, can we?"

Sam removed his pipe, blew a cloud straight before him, and replaced it.

Dick reddened slowly, got up with an incidental remark about damn fools, and began to spread his blankets beneath the lean-to shelter. He muttered to himself, angered at the dead opposition of circumstance which he could not push aside. Suddenly he seized the girl again by the arm.

"Why you come?" he demanded in Ojibway. "Where you get your blankets? Where you get your grub? How you make the Long Trail? What you do when we go far and fast? What we do with you now?" Then meeting nothing but the stolidity with which the Indian always conceals pain, he flung her aside. "Stupid owl!" he growled.

He sat on the ground and began to take off his moccasins with ostentatious deliberation, abruptly

indifferent to it all. Slowly he prepared for the night, yawning often, looking at the sky, arranging the fire, emphasising and delaying each of his movements as though to prove to himself that he acknowledged only the habitual. At last he turned in, his shoulder thrust aggressively toward the two motionless figures by the fire.

It was by now close to midnight. The big moon had long since slipped from behind the solitary wolf on the hill. Yet Sam Bolton made no move toward his blankets, and the girl did not stir from the downcast attitude into which she had first fallen. The old woodsman looked at the situation with steady eyes. He realised to the full what Dick Herron's thoughtlessness had brought on them. A woman, even a savage woman inured to the wilderness, was a hindrance. She could not travel as fast nor as far; she could not bear the same burdens, endure the same hardship; she would consume her share of the provisions. And before this expedition into the Silent Places should be finished the journeying might require the speed of a course after quarry, the packing would come finally to the men's back, the winter would

have to be met in the open, and the North, lavish during these summer months, sold her sustenance dear when the snows fell. The time might come when these men would have to arm for the struggle. Cruelty, harshness, relentlessness, selfishness, singleness of purpose, hardness of heart they would have perforce to assume. And when they stripped for such a struggle, Sam Bolton knew that among other things this woman would have to go. If the need arose, she would have to die; for this quest was greater than the life of any woman or any man. Would it not be better to send her back through certain hardship now, rather than carry her on to a possible death in the White Silence. For the North as yet but skirmished. Her true power lay behind the snows and the ice.

The girl stood in the same attitude. Sam Bolton spoke to her.

"May-may-gwán."

"Little Father."

"Why have you followed us?"

The girl did not reply.

"Sister," said the woodsman, kindly, "I am an

old man. You have called me Father. Why have you followed us?"

"I found Jibiwánisi good in my sight," she said, with a simple dignity, "and he looked on me."

"It was a foolish thing to do."

"Ae," replied the girl.

"He does not wish to take you in his wigwam."

"Eagle-eye is angry now. Anger melts under the sun."

"I do not think his will."

"Then I will make his fire and his buckskin and cook his food."

"We go on a long journey."

"I will follow."

"No," replied the woodsman, abruptly, "we will send you back."

The girl remained silent.

"Well?" insisted Bolton.

"I shall not go."

A little puzzled at this insistence, delivered in so calm a manner, Sam hesitated as to what to say. Suddenly the girl stepped forward to face him.

"Little Father," she said, solemnly, "I cannot go. Those are not my people. I do not know my

people. My heart is not with them. My heart is here. Little Father," she went on, dropping her voice, "it is here, here, here!" she clasped her breast with both hands. "I do not know how it is. There is a pain in my breast, and my heart is sad with the words of Eagle-eye. And yet here the birds sing and the sun is bright. Away from here it is dark. That is all I know. I do not understand it, Little Father. My heart is here. I cannot go away. If you drive me out, I shall follow. Kill me, if you wish, Little Father; I do not care for that. I shall not hinder you on the Long Trail. I shall do many things. When I cannot travel fast enough, then leave me. My heart is here; I cannot go away." She stopped abruptly, her eyes glowing, her breath short with the quivering of passion. Then all at once her passivity fell on her. She stood, her head downcast, patient, enduring, bending to circumstance meekly as an Indian woman should.

Sam Bolton made no reply to this appeal. He drew his sheath-knife, cut in two the doubled three-point blanket, gave one of the halves to the girl, and indicated to her a place under the shelter. In the firelight his face hardened as he cast his mind again

over the future. He had not solved the problem, only postponed it. In the great struggle women would have no place.

At two o'clock, waking in the manner of woodsmen and sailors the world over, he arose to replenish the fire. He found it already bright with new fuel, and the Indian girl awake. She lay on her side, the blanket about her shoulders, her great wistful eyes wide open. A flame shot into the air. It threw a momentary illumination into the angles of the shelter, discovering Dick, asleep in heavy exhaustion, his right forearm across his eyes. The girl stole a glance at Sam Bolton. Apparently he was busy with the fire. She reached out to touch the young man's blanket.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Dick was afoot after a few hours' sleep. He aroused Sam and went about the preparation of breakfast. May-may-gwán attempted to help, but both she and her efforts were disregarded. She brought wood, but Dick rustled a supply just the same, paying no attention to the girl's little pile; she put on fresh fuel, but Dick, without impatience, —indeed, as though he were merely rearranging the fire,—contrived to undo her work; she brought to hand the utensils, but Dick, in searching for them, always looked where they had originally been placed. His object seemed not so much to thwart the girl as to ignore her. When breakfast was ready he divided it into two portions, one of which he ate. After the meal he washed the few dishes. Once he took a cup from the girl's hand as she was drying it, much as he would have taken it from the top of a stump. He then proceeded to clean it as though it had just been used.

May-may-gwán made no sign that she noticed these things. After a little she helped Sam roll the blankets, strike the shelter, construct the packs. Here her assistance was accepted, though Sam did not address her. After a few moments the start was made.

The first few hours were spent as before, wading the stream. As she could do nothing in the water, May-may-gwán kept to the woods, walking stolidly onward, her face to the front, expressionless, hiding whatever pain she may have felt. This side of noon, however, the travellers came to a cataract falling over a fifty-foot ledge into a long, cliff-bordered pool.

It became necessary to portage. The hill pinched down steep and close. There existed no trails. Dick took the little camp axe to find a way. He clambered up one after the other three ravines—grown with brush and heavy ferns, damp with a trickle of water,—always to be stopped near the summit by a blank wall impossible to scale. At length he found a passage he thought might be practicable. Thereupon he cut a canoe trail back to the water-side.

In clearing this trail his attention turned to making room for a canoe on a man's back. Therefore the footing he bothered with not at all. Saplings he clipped down by bending them with the left hand, and striking at the strained fibres where they bowed. A single blow would thus fell treelets of some size. When he had finished his work there resulted a winding, cylindrical hole in the forest growth some three feet from the ground. Through this cylinder the canoe would be passed while its bearer picked a practised way among slippery rocks, old stubs, new sapling stumps, and undergrowth below. Men who might, in later years, wish to follow this Indian trail, would look not for footprints but for waist-high indications of the axe.

When the canoe had been carried to the top of the bluff that marked the water-fall, it was relaunched in a pool. In the meantime May-may-gwán, who had at last found a use for her willingness, carried the packs. Dick re-embarked. His companion perceived that he intended to shove off as soon as the other should have taken his place. Sam frustrated that, however, by holding fast to

the gunwale. May-may-gwán stepped in amidships, with a half-deprecating glance at the young man's inscrutable back. At the end of the brief paddling the upper pool allowed them, she was first ashore.

Late that afternoon the travel for a half mile became exceedingly difficult. The stream took on the character of a mountain brook. It hardly paid to float the canoe in the tiny holes among the rocks, miniature cascades, and tortuous passages. The forest grew to the very banks, and arched over to exclude the sun. Every few feet was to be avoided a tree, half clinging to the bank, leaning at a perilous slant out over the creek. Fortunately the spring freshets in this country of the great snows were powerful enough to sweep out the timber actually fallen, so the course of the stream itself was clear of jams. At length the travellers reached a beaver-dam, and so to a little round lake among the hills. They had come to the head waters of the Mattawishguia.

In the lake stood two moose, old and young. Dick succeeded in killing the yearling, though it took two shots from his Winchester. It was de-

cided to camp here over one day in order that the meat might be saved.

A circle of hills surrounded the little body of water. On them grew maples and birches, among which scattered a few hemlocks and an occasional pine. At the edge of the water were cedars leaning out to look at their reflections. A deep and solemn peace seemed to brood over the miniature lake. Such affairs as bird songs, the slap of a paddle, the shots from Dick's rifle could not break this strange stillness. They spoke hastily, and relapsed to silence, like the rare necessary voices in a room where one lies dead. The hush, calm and primal, with the infinity of the wilderness as its only measure of time, took no account of the shock of a second's interruption. Two loons swam like ghosts. Everywhere and nowhere among the trees, in the hills, over the water, the finer senses were almost uneasily conscious of a vast and awful presence. It was as yet aloof, unheeding, buddhistic, brooding in nirvanic calm, still unawakened to put forth the might of its displeasure. Under its dreaming eyes men might, fearfully and with reverence, carry on their affairs,—fearfully and with reverence, catching the

breath, speaking low, growing silent and stern in the presence of the North.

At the little camp under the cedars, Dick Herron and Sam Bolton, assisted by the Ojibway girl, May-may-gwán, cut the moose-meat into thin strips, salted, and dried it in the bright sun. And since the presence of loons argued fish, they set their nets and lines. Several days thus passed.

In their relations the three promptly settled back into a species of routine. Men who travel in the Silent Places speedily take on the colour of their surroundings. They become silent also. A band of voyageurs of sufficient strength may chatter and sing; they have by the very force of numbers created an atmosphere of their own. But two are not enough for this. They have little to say, for their souls are laved by the great natural forces.

Dick Herron, even in ordinary circumstances, withdrew rather grimly into himself. He looked out at things from beneath knit brows; he held his elbows close to his sides, his fists clenched, his whole spiritual being self-contained and apart, watchful for enmity in what he felt but could not understand. But to this, his normal habit, now was added a sul-

lenness almost equally instinctive. In some way he felt himself aggrieved by the girl's presence. At first it was merely the natural revolt of a very young man against assuming responsibility he had not invited. The resulting discomfort of mind, however, he speedily assigned to the girl's account. He continued, as at first, to ignore her. But in the slow rumination of the forest he became more and more irritably sensible of her presence. Sam's taciturnity was contrastedly sunny and open. He looked on things about him with the placid receptivity of an old man, and said nothing because there was nothing to say. The Ojibway girl remained inscrutable, helping where she could, apparently desirous of neither praise nor blame.

At the end of three days the provisions were ready. There had resulted perhaps sixty pounds of "jerky." It now became necessary to leave the water-way, and to strike directly through the forest, over the hills, and into the country of the Kabinikágam.

Dick shouldered a thirty-pound pack and the canoe. Sam Bolton and the girl managed the remainder. Every twenty minutes or so they would

rest, sinking back against the trunks of trees, mossy stones, or a bank of new ferns. The forest was open and inexpressibly lofty. Moose maples, young birches, and beeches threw their coolness across the face, then above them the columns of the trunks, then far up in green distance the leaves again, like the gold-set roof of a church. The hill mounted always before them. Ancient rocks hoary with moss, redolent of dampness, stood like abandoned altars given over to decay. A strange, sweet wind freighted with stray bird-notes wandered aimlessly.

Nothing was said. Dick led the way and set the intervals of the carrying. When he swung the canoe from his shoulders the others slipped their tump-lines. Then all rubbed their faces with the broad caribou-leaf to keep off the early flies, and lay back, arms extended, breathing deep, resting like boxers between the rounds. Once at the top of the ridge Dick climbed a tree. He did this, not so much in expectation of seeing the water-courses themselves, as to judge by the general lay of the country where they might be found.

In a bare open space under hemlocks Sam indicated a narrow, high, little pen, perhaps three feet

long by six inches wide, made of cut saplings. Dick examined it.

"Marten deadfall," he pronounced. "Made last winter. Somebody's been trapping through here."

After a time a blaze on a tree was similarly remarked. Then the travellers came to a tiny creek, which, being followed, soon debouched into a larger. This in turn became navigable, after the north-country fashion. That is to say, the canoe with its load could much of the time be floated down by the men wading in the bed of the creek. Finally Sam, who was in the lead, jerked his head toward the left bank.

"Their winter camp," said he, briefly.

A dim trail led from the water to a sheltered knoll. There stood the framework of a pointed tepee, the long poles spread like fingers above their crossing point. A little pile of gnawed white skulls of various sizes represented at least a portion of the season's catch. Dick turned them over with his foot, identifying them idly. From the sheltered branches of a near-by spruce hung four pairs of snow-shoes cached there until the next winter. Sam gave his first attention to these.

"A man, a woman, and two well-grown children," he pronounced. He ran his hand over the bulging raquette with the long tail and the slightly up-curved end. "Ojibway pattern," he concluded. "Dick, we're in the first hunting district. Here's where we get down to business."

He went over the ground twice carefully, examining the state of the offal, the indications of the last fire.

"They've been gone about six weeks," he surmised. "If they ain't gone visiting, they must be down-stream somewheres. These fellows don't get in to trade their fur 'till along about August."

Two days subsequent, late in the afternoon, Dick pointed out what looked to be a dark streak beneath a bowlder that lay some distance from the banks on a shale bar.

"What's that animal?" he asked.

"Can't make her out," said Bolton, after inspection.

"Ninny-moosh," said the Indian girl, indifferently. It was the first word she had spoken since her talk with the older man.

"It's a dog, all right," conceded Sam. "She has sharp eyes."

The animal rose and began to bark. Two more crashed toward him through the bushes. A thin stream of smoke disengaged itself from the tops of the forest trees. As they swept around the bend the travellers saw a man contemplating them stol idly through a screen of leaves.

The canoe floated on. About an hundred yards below the Indians Sam ordered a landing. Camp was made as usual. Supper was cooked. The fire replenished. Then, just before the late sunset of the Far North, the bushes crackled.

"Now let me do the talking," warned Sam.

"All right. I'll just keep my eye on this," Dick nodded toward the girl. "She's Ojibway, too, you know. She may give us away."

"She can't only guess," Sam reminded. "But there ain't any danger, anyway."

The leaves parted. The Indian appeared, sauntering with elaborate carelessness, his beady eyes shifting here and there in an attempt to gather what these people might be about.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'," he greeted them.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Indian advanced silently to the fireside, where he squatted on his heels. He filled a pipe, scraping the tobacco from the square plug Sam extended to him. While he did this, and while he stuffed it into the bowl, his keen eyes shifted here and there, gathering the material for conclusions.

Sam, watchful but also silent, could almost follow his mental processes. The canoe meant travel, the meagreness of the outfits either rapid or short travel, the two steel traps travel beyond the sources of supply. Then inspection passed lightly over the girl and from her to the younger man. With a flash of illumination Sam Bolton saw how valuable in allaying suspicion this evidence of a peaceful errand might prove to be. Men did not bring their women on important missions involving speed and danger.

Abruptly the Indian spoke, going directly to the heart of the matter, after the Indian fashion.

"Where you from?"

"Winnipeg," replied Sam, naming the headquarters of the Company.

The direction of travel was toward Winnipeg. Sam was perfectly aware of the discrepancy, but he knew better than to offer gratuitous explanation. The Indian smoked.

"Where you come from now?" he inquired, finally.

" 'Tschi-gammi."*

This was understandable. Remained only the object of an expedition of this peculiar character. Sam Bolton knew that the Indian would satisfy himself by surmises,—he would never apply the direct question to a man's affairs,—and surmise might come dangerously near the truth. So he proceeded to impart a little information in his own way.

"You are the hunter of this district?" Sam asked.

"Yes."

"How far do you trap?"

The Indian mentioned creeks and rivers as his boundaries.

* Lake Superior.

"Where do you get your debt?"

"Missináibi."

"That is a long trail."

"Yes."

"Do many take it each year?"

The Indian mentioned rapidly a dozen names of families.

Sam at once took another tack.

"I do not know this country. Are there large lakes?"

"There is Animiki."

"Has it fish? Good wood?"

"Much wood. Ogâ,* kinoj."†

Sam paused.

"Could a *brigade* of canoes reach it easily?" he inquired.

Now a *brigade* is distinctly an institution of the Honourable the Hudson's Bay Company. It is used for two purposes; to maintain communication with the outside world, and to establish winter camps in the autumn or to break them up in the spring. At once the situation became clear. A gleam of comprehension flashed over the Indian's eyes. With the

* Pickerel. † Pike.

peculiar attention to detail distinctively the forest runner's he indicated a route. Sam was satisfied to let the matter rest there for the present.

The next evening he visited the Indian's camp. It was made under a spreading tree, the tepee poles partly resting against some of the lower branches. The squaw and her woman child kept to the shadows of the wigwam, but the boy, a youth of perhaps fifteen years, joined the men by the fire.

Sam accepted the hospitality of a pipe of tobacco, and attacked the question in hand from a ground tacitly assumed since the evening before.

"If Hutsonbaycompany make winterpost on Animiki will you get your debt there instead of Missináibie?" he asked first of all.

Of course the Indian assented.

"How much fur do you get, good year?"

The Indian rapidly ran over a list.

"Lots of fur. Is it going to last? Do you keep district strict here?" inquired Sam.

Under cover of this question Sam was feeling for important information. As has perhaps been mentioned, in a normal Indian community each head of a family is assigned certain hunting districts over

which he has exclusive hunting and trapping privileges. This naturally tends toward preservation of the fur. An Indian knows not only where each beaver dam is situated, but he knows also the number of beaver it contains and how many can be taken without diminution of the supply. If, however, the privileges are not strictly guarded, such moderation does not obtain. When an Indian finds a dam, he cleans it out; because if he does not, the next comer will. Sam's question then apparently had reference only to the probability that the fur in a close district would be strictly enough preserved to make the establishment of a winter post worth while. In reality he wanted to measure the possibility of an outsider's gaining a foothold. Logically in a section where the tribal rights were rigidly held to, this would be impossible except through friendship or purchase; while in a more loosely organized community a stranger might readily insinuate himself.

"Good keeping of district," replied the Indian. "I keep head-waters of Kabinikágam down to Sand River. When I find man trapping on my ground, I shoot him. Fur last all right."

This sufficed for the moment. The next morning Sam went over early to the other camp.

"To-day I think we go," he announced. "Now you tell me all the hunters, where I find them, what are their districts, how much fur they kill."

"Ah hah!" assented the Indian. Sam's leisurely and indirect method had convinced him. Easily given information on the other hand would have set him to thinking; and to think, with an Indian, is usually to become suspicious.

The two descended to the shore. There they squatted on their heels before a little patch of wet sand while the Indian explained. He marked roughly, but with almost the accuracy of a survey, the courses of streams and hills, and told of the routes among them. Sam listened, his gnarled mahogany hand across his mouth, his shrewd gray eyes bent attentively on the cabalistic signs and scratches. An Indian will remember, from once traversing it, not only the greater landmarks, but the little incidents of bowlder, current, eddy, strip of woods, bend of trail. It remains clear-cut in his mind forever after. The old woodsman had in his long experience acquired something of this faculty.

He comprehended the details, and, what is more, stored them away in his memory where he could turn to them readily. This was no small feat.

With an abrupt movement of the back of his hand the Indian smoothed the sand. Squatting back more on his haunches, he refilled his pipe and began to tell of the trappers. In their description he referred always to the map he had drawn on Bolton's imagination as though it had actually lain spread out before them. Sam referred each name to its district, as you or I would write it across the section of a chart, and kept accurately in mind which squares of the invisible map had been thus assigned and which not. It was an extraordinary effort, but one not unusual among practised woods runners. This peculiarly minute and concrete power of recollection is early developed in the wild life.

The Indian finished. Sam remained a moment in contemplation. The districts were all occupied, and the name of Jingoss did not appear. That was, however, a small matter. The Ojibway might well have changed his name, or he might be paying for the privilege of hunting in another man's territory.

A less experienced man would have been strongly tempted to the more direct question. But Sam knew that the faintest hint of ulterior motive would not be lost on the Indian's sharp perceptions. An inquiry, carelessly and indirectly made, might do no harm. But then again it might. And it was better to lose two years of time in the search than a single grain of confidence in those with whom the little party might come in contact.

After all, Sam Bolton was well satisfied. He had, by his simple diplomacy, gained several valuable results. He had firmly convinced one man of a common body, wherein news travels quickly, of his apparent intentions; he had, furthermore, an exact knowledge of where to find each and every district head-man of the whole Kabinikágam country. Whether or not the man he sought would prove to be one of these head-men, or the guest or lessee of one of them, was a question only to be answered by direct search. At least he knew where to search, which was a distinct and valuable advantage.

"Mi-gwetch—thank you," he said to the Indian when he had finished. "I understand. I go now to see the Lake. I go to talk to each of your head-

men. I go to see the trapping country with my own eyes. When I have seen all, I go to Winnipeg to tell my head-man what I have seen."

The Indian nodded. It would have been quite inconceivable to him had Sam suggested accepting anything less than the evidence of his eyes.

The three resumed their journey that afternoon. Sam knew exactly where he was going. Dick had fallen into a sullen yet rebellious mood, unaccountable even to himself. In his spirit was the ferment of a resentfulness absolutely without logical object. With such a man ferment demands action. Here, in the accustomed labours of this woods travel, was nothing to bite on save monotony. Dick Herron resented the monotony, resented the deliberation necessary to so delicate a mission, resented the unvarying tug of his tump-line or the unchanging yield of the water to his paddle, resented the placidity of the older man, above all resented the meek and pathetic submissiveness of the girl. His narrow eyes concentrated their gaze ominously. He muttered to himself. The untrained, instinctive strength of the man's spirit fretted against delay. His enthusiasm, the fire of his hope, urged him to

earn his self-approval by great exertion. Great exertion was impossible. Always, day by day, night by night, he chafed at the snail-like pace with which things moved, chafed at the delay imposed by the nature of the quest, the policy of the old man, the presence of the girl. Only, in the rudimentary processes of his intelligence, he confused the three in one, and the presence of the girl alone received the brunt of his sullen displeasure. In the splendour of his strength, head down, heart evil, restrained to a bitter obedience only by the knowledge that he could do nothing alone, he broke through the opposing wilderness.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sam Bolton gauged perfectly the spirit in his comrade, but paid it little attention. He knew it as a chemical reaction of a certain phase of forest travel. It argued energy, determination, dogged pluck when the need should arise, and so far it was good. The woods life affects various men in various ways, but all in a manner peculiar to itself. It is a reagent unlike any to be found in other modes of life. The moment its influence reaches the spirit, in that moment does the man change utterly from the person he has been in other and ordinary surroundings; and the instant he emerges from its control he reverts to his accustomed bearing. But in the dwelling of the woods he becomes silent. It may be the silence of a self-contained sufficiency; the silence of an equable mind; the silence variously of awe, even of fear; it may be the silence of sullenness. This, as much as the vast stillness of the wilderness, has earned for the region its designation of the Silent Places.

Nor did the older woodsman fear any direct results from the younger's very real, though baseless, anger. These men were bound together by something stronger than any part of themselves. Over them stood the Company, and to its commands all other things gave way. No matter how rebellious might be Dick Herron's heart, how ruffled the surface of his daily manner, Bolton knew perfectly well he would never for a single instant swerve in his loyalty to the main object of the expedition. Serene in this consciousness, the old woodsman dwelt in a certain sweet and gentle rumination of his own. Among the finer instincts of his being many subtle mysteries of the forest found their correspondences. The feeling of these satisfied him entirely, though of course he was incapable of their intellectualisation.

The days succeeded one another. The camps by the rivers or in the woods were in essential all alike. The shelter, the shape, and size of the tiny clearing, the fire, the cooking utensils scattered about, the little articles of personal belonging were the same. Only certain details of surrounding differed, and they were not of importance,—birch-trees for pop-

lars, cedar for both, a river bend to the northwest instead of the southwest, still water for swift, a low bank for a high; but always trees, water, bank, and the sky brilliant with stars. After a little the day's progress became a myth, to be accepted only by the exercise of faith. The forest was a great treadmill in which men toiled all day, only to be surrounded at night by the same grandeurs and littlenesses they had that morning left. In the face of this apparent futility time blew vast. Years were as nothing measured by the task of breaking through the enchanted web that enmeshed them.

And yet all knew by experience, though no one of them could rise to a realisation of the fact, that some day their canoe would round the bend and they would find themselves somewhere. Then they could say to themselves that they had arrived, and could tell themselves that between here and their starting-point lay so many hundred miles. Yet in their secret hearts they would not believe it. They would know that in reality it lay but just around the corner. Only between were dream-days of the shifting forest heavy with toil.

This is the enchantment the North lays on her

children, so that when the toil oppresses them and death seems to win, they may not care greatly to struggle, knowing that the struggle is vain.

In the country of the Kabinikágam they visited thus many hunting districts. The travel neither hastened nor lagged. From time to time it was necessary to kill, and then the meat must be cared for. Berries and wild rice were to be gathered. July drew near its end.

Sam Bolton, knowing now the men with whom he had to deal, found no difficulty in the exercise of his simple diplomacy. The Ojibway defaulter was not to be heard of, but every nook searched without result narrowed the remaining possibilities. Everything went well enough until late one afternoon.

The portage happened to lead above a narrow gorge over a rapids. To accomplish it the travellers had first to scale a steep little hill, then to skirt a huge rounded rock that overhung the gorge. The roughness of the surface and the adhesive power of their moccasins alone held them to the slant. These were well sufficient. Unfortunately, however, Dick, without noticing it, had stepped into

a little pool of water on disembarking. Buckskin while dry is very adhesive; when wet very slippery. As he followed Sam out on the curving cheek of the rock his foot slid, he lost his equilibrium, was on the edge of falling, overbalanced by the top-heavy pack he was carrying. Luckily Sam himself was portaging the canoe. Dick, with marvellous quickness, ducked loose from the tump-line. The pack bounded down the slant, fell with a splash, and was whirled away. With the impetus of the same motion the young man twisted himself as violently as possible to regain his footing. He would probably have succeeded had it not been for the Indian girl. She had been following the two, a few steps in the rear. As Dick's foot turned, she slipped her own pack and sprang forward, reaching out her arm in the hope of steadying him. Unfortunately she did this only in time to get in the way of the strong twist Dick made for recovery. The young man tottered for an instant on the very brink of saving himself, then gave it up, and fell as loosely as possible into the current.

May-may-gwán, aghast at what she had done, stood paralyzed, staring into the gorge. Sam

swung the canoe from his shoulders and ran on over the hill and down the other side.

The Indian girl saw the inert body of the woodsman dashed down through the moil and water, now showing an arm, now a leg, only once, for a single instant, the head. Twice it hit obstacles, limp as a sack of flour. Then it disappeared.

Immediately she regained the use of her legs, and scrambled over the hill after Sam, her breath strangling her. She found below the rapids a pool, and half in the water at its edge Dick seated, bruised and cut, spitting water, and talking excitedly to his companion. Instantly she understood. The young woods runner, with the rare quickness of expedient peculiar to these people, had allowed himself to be carried through the rapids muscle-loose, as an inanimate object would be carried, without an attempt to help himself in any way. It was a desperate chance, but it was the only chance. The slightest stiffening of the muscles, the least struggle would have thrown him out of the water's natural channel against the bowlders; and then a rigidly held body would have offered only too good a resistance to the shock. By a miracle of fortune he had

been carried through, bruised and injured, to be sure, but conscious. Sam had dragged him to the bush-grown bank. There he sat up in the water and cleared his lungs. He was wildly excited.

"She did it!" he burst out, as soon as he could speak. "She did it a purpose! She reached out and pushed me! By God, there she is now!"

With the instinct of the hunter he had managed to cling to his rifle. He wrenched at the magazine lever, throwing the muzzle forward for a shot, but it had been jammed, and he was unable to move it.

"She reached out and pushed me! I felt her do it!" he cried. He attempted to rise, but fell back, groaning with a pain that kept him quiet for several moments.

"Sam!" he muttered, "she's there yet. Kill her. Damn it, didn't you see! I had my balance again, and she pushed me! She had it in for me!" His face whitened for an instant as he moved, then flooded with a red anger. "My God!" he cried, in the anguish of a strong man laid low, "she's busted me all over!" He wrenched loose his shoulders from Sam's support, struggled to his knees, and fell back, a groan of pain seeming fairly to burst from

his heart. His head hit sharply against a stone. He lay still.

"May-may-gwán!" called Sam Bolton, sharply.

She came at once, running eagerly, the paralysis of her distress broken by his voice. Sam directed her by nods of the head. With some difficulty they carried the unconscious man to the flat and laid him down, his head on Sam's rolled coat. Then, while May-may-gwán, under his curtly delivered directions, built a fire, heated water, carried down the two remaining packs and opened them, Sam tenderly removed Dick's clothes, and examined him from head to foot. The cuts on the head were nothing to a strong man; the bruises less. Manipulation discovered nothing wrong with the collar-bone and ribs. But at last Sam uttered a quick exclamation of discovery.

Dick's right ankle was twisted strongly outward and back.

An inexperienced man would have pronounced it a dislocation, but Sam knew better. He knew better because just once, nearly fifteen years before, he had assisted Dr. Cockburn at Conjuror's House in the caring for exactly such an accident. Now he

stood for some moments in silence recalling painfully each little detail of what he had observed and of what the physician had told him.

Rapidly by means of twigs and a tracing on the wet sand he explained to May-may-gwán what was the matter and what was to be done. The fibula, or outer bone of the leg, had been snapped at its lower end just above the ankle, the foot had been dislocated to one side, and either the inner ligament of the ankle had given way, or—what would be more serious—one of the ankle-bones itself had been torn. Sam Bolton realised fully that it was advisable to work with the utmost rapidity, before the young man should regain consciousness, in order that the reduction of the fracture might be made while the muscles were relaxed. Nevertheless, he took time both to settle his own ideas, and to explain them to the girl. It was the luckiest chance of Dick Herron's life that he happened to be travelling with the one man who had assisted in the skilled treatment of such a case. Otherwise he would most certainly have been crippled.

Sam first of all pried from the inner construction of the canoe two or three of the flat cedar strips

used to reinforce the bottom. These he laid in several thicknesses to make a board of some strength. On the board he folded a blanket in wedge form, the thick end terminating abruptly three or four inches from the bottom. He laid aside several buckskin thongs, and set May-may-gwán to ripping bandages of such articles of clothing as might suit.

Then he bent the injured leg at the knee. May-may-gwán held it in that position, while Sam manipulated the foot into what he judged to be the proper position. Especially did he turn the foot strongly inward that the inner ankle-bone might fall to its place. As to the final result he confessed himself almost painfully in doubt, but did the best he knew. He remembered the post-surgeon's cunning comments, and tried to assure himself that the fractured ends of the bones met each other fairly, without the intervention of tendons or muscle-covering, and that there was no obstruction to the movements of the ankle. When he had finished, his brow was wrinkled with anxiety, but he was satisfied that he had done to the limit of his knowledge.

May-may-gwán now held the cedar board, with its pad, against the inside of the leg. Sam bound

the thin end of the wedge-shaped blanket to the knee. Thus the thick end of the pad pressed against the calf just above the ankle, leaving the foot and the injured bone free of the board. Sam passed a broad buckskin thong about the ankle and foot in such a manner as to hold the foot from again turning out. Thus the fracture was fixed in place. The bandages were wound smoothly to hold everything secure.

The two then, with the utmost precaution, carried their patient up the bank to a level space suitable for a camp, where he was laid as flat as possible. The main business was done, although still there remained certain cuts and contusions, especially that on the forehead, which had stunned him.

After the reduction of the fracture,—which was actually consummated before Dick regained his consciousness,—and the carrying of the young man to the upper flat, Sam curtly instructed May-may-gwán to gather balsam for the dressing of the various severer bruises. She obtained the gum, a little at a time, from a number of trees. Here and there, where the bark had cracked or been abraded, hard-skinned blisters had exuded. These, when

pricked, yielded a liquid gum, potent in healing. While she was collecting this in a quickly fashioned birch-bark receptacle, Sam made camp.

He realised fully that the affair was one of many weeks, if not of months. On the flat tongue overlooking the river he cleared a wide space, and with the back of his axe he knocked the hummocks flat. A score or so of sapling poles he trimmed. Three he tied together tripod-wise, using for the purpose a strip of the inner bark of cedar. The rest he leaned against these three. He postponed, until later, the stripping of birch-bark to cover this frame, and gave his attention to laying a soft couch for Dick's convalescence. The foundation he made of caribou-moss, gathered dry from the heights; the top of balsam boughs cleverly thatched so that the ends curved down and in, away from the recumbent body. Over all he laid what remained of his own half blanket. Above the bed he made a framework from which a sling would be hung to suspend the injured leg.

All this consumed not over twenty minutes. At the end of that time he glanced up to meet Dick's eyes.

"Leg broke," he answered the inquiry in them. "That's all."

"That girl—," began Dick.

"Shut up!" said Sam.

He moved here and there, constructing, by means of flat stones, a trough to be used as a cooking-range. At the edge of the clearing he met the Indian girl returning with her little birch-bark saucer.

"Little Sister," said he.

She raised her eyes to him.

"I want the truth."

"What truth, Little Father?"

He looked searchingly into her eyes.

"It does not matter; I have it," he replied.

She did not ask him further. If she had any curiosity, she did not betray it; if she had any suspicion of what he meant, she did not show it.

Sam returned to where Dick lay.

"Look here, Sam," said he, "this comes of——"

"Shut up!" said Sam again. "Look here, you, you've made trouble enough. Now you're laid up, and you're laid up for a good long while. This ain't any ordinary leg break. It means three months, and it may mean that you'll never walk

straight again. It's got to be treated mighty careful, and you've got to do just what I tell you. You just behave yourself. It wasn't anybody's fault. That girl had nothing to do with it. If you weren't a great big fool you'd know it. We both got to take care of you. Now you treat her decent, and you treat me decent. It's time you came off."

He said it as though he meant it. Nevertheless it was with the most elaborate tenderness that he, assisted by May-may-gwán, carried Dick to his new quarters. But in spite of the utmost care, the transportation was painful. The young man was left with no strength. The rest of the afternoon he dozed in a species of torpor.

Sam's energy toward permanent establishment did not relax. He took a long tramp in search of canoe birches, from which at last he brought back huge rolls of thick bark. These he and the girl sewed together in overlapping seams, using white spruce-roots for the purpose. The result was a water-tight covering for the wigwam. A pile of firewood was the fruit of two hours' toil. In the meantime May-may-gwán had caught some fish with the hook and line and had gathered some ber-

ries. She made Dick a strong broth of dried meat. At evening the old man and the girl ate their meal together at the edge of the bluff overlooking the broil of the river. They said little, but somehow the meal was peaceful, with a content unknown in the presence of the impatient and terrible young man.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

During the days that ensued a certain intimacy sprang up between Sam Bolton and the Indian girl. At first their talk was brief and confined to the necessities. Then matters of opinion, disjointed, fragmentary, began to creep in. Finally the two came to know each other, less by what was actually said, than by the attitude of mind such confidences presupposed. One topic they avoided. Sam, for all his shrewdness, could not determine to what degree had persisted the young man's initial attraction for the girl. Of her devotion there could be no question, but in how much it depended on the necessity of the moment lay the puzzle. Her demeanor was inscrutable. Yet Sam came gradually to trust to her loyalty.

In the soft, sweet open-air life the days passed stately in the manner of figures on an ancient tapestry. Certain things were each morning to be done, —the dressing of Dick's cuts and contusions with

the healing balsam, the rebandaging and adjusting of the splints and steadying buckskin strap; the necessary cooking and cleaning; the cutting of wood; the fishing below the rapids; the tending of traps; the occasional hunting of larger game; the setting of snares for rabbits. From certain good skins of the latter May-may-gwán was engaged in weaving a blanket, braiding the long strips after a fashion of her own. She smoked tanned buckskin, and with it repaired thoroughly both the men's garments and her own. These things were to be done, though leisurely, and with slow, ruminative pauses for the dreaming of forest dreams.

But inside the wigwam Dick Herron lay helpless, his hands clenched, his eyes glaring red with an impatience he seemed to hold his breath to repress. Time was to be passed. That was all he knew, all he thought about, all he cared. He seized the minutes grimly and flung them behind him. So absorbed was he in this, that he seemed to give grudgingly and hastily his attention to anything else. He never spoke except when absolutely necessary; it almost seemed that he never moved. Of Sam he appeared utterly unconscious. The older man per-

formed the little services about him quite unnoticed. The Indian girl Dick would not suffer near him at all. Twice he broke silence for what might be called commentatorial speech.

"It'll be October before we can get started," he growled one evening.

"Yes," said Sam.

"You wait till I *can* get out!" he said on another occasion, in vague threat of determination.

At the beginning of the third week Sam took his seat by the moss and balsam pallet and began to fill his pipe in preparation for a serious talk.

"Dick," said he, "I've made up my mind we've wasted enough time here."

Herron made no reply.

"I'm going to leave you here and go to look over the other hunting districts by myself."

Still no reply.

"Well?" demanded Sam.

"What about me?" asked Dick.

"The girl will take care of you."

A long silence ensued. "She'll take everything we've got and get out," said Dick at last.

"She will not! She'd have done it before now"

"She'll quit me the first Injuns that come along."

Sam abandoned the point.

"You needn't take the risk unless you want to. If you say so, I'll wait."

"Oh, damn the risk," cried Dick, promptly. "Go ahead."

The woodsman smoked.

"Sam," said the younger man.

"What?"

"I know I'm hard to get along with just now. Don't mind me. It's hell to lie on your back and be able to do nothing. I've seemed to hinder the game from the first. Just wait till I'm up again!"

"That's all right, my boy," replied Sam. "I understand. Don't worry. Just take it easy. I'll look over the district, so we won't be losing any time. And, Dick, be decent to the girl."

"To hell with the girl," growled Dick, lapsing abruptly from his expansive mood. "She got me into this."

Not another word would he speak, but lay, staring upward, chewing the cud of resentment.

Promptly on the heels of his decision Sam Bolton had a long talk with May-may-gwán, then departed carrying a little pack. It was useless to think now of the canoe, and in any case the time of year favoured cross-country travel. The distances, thus measured, were not excessive, and from the Indian's descriptions, Sam's slow-brooding memory had etched into his mind an accurate map of the country.

At noon the girl brought Dick his meal. After he had eaten she removed the few utensils. Then she returned.

"The Little Father commanded that I care for your hurt," she said, simply.

"My leg's all right now," growled Dick. "I can bandage it myself."

May-may-gwán did not reply, but left the tent. In a moment she reappeared carrying forked switches, a square of white birch-bark, and a piece of charcoal.

"Thus it is," said she rapidly. "These be the leg bones and this the bone of the ankle. This bone is broken, so. Thus it is held in place by the skill of the Little Father. Thus it is healing, with stiffness

of the muscles and the gristle, so that always Eagle eye will walk like wood, and never will he run. The Little Father has told May-may-gwán what there is to do. It is now the time. Fifteen suns have gone since the hurt."

She spoke simply. Dick, interested in spite of himself, stared at the switches and the hasty charcoal sketch. The dead silence hung for a full minute. Then the young man fell back from his elbow with an enigmatical snort. May-may-gwán assumed consent and set to work on the simple yet delicate manipulations, massages, and flexings, which persisted in with due care lest the fracture slip, would ultimately restore the limb to its full usefulness.

Once a day she did this, thrice a day she brought food. The rest of the time she was busy about her own affairs; but never too occupied to loop up a section of the tepee covering for the purpose of admitting fresh air, to bring a cup of cold water, to readjust the sling which suspended the injured leg, or to perform an hundred other little services. She did these things with inscrutable demeanour. As Dick always accepted them in silence, she offered

them equally in silence. No one could have guessed the thoughts that passed in her heart.

At the end of a week Dick raised himself suddenly on his elbow.

"Some one is coming!" he exclaimed, in English.

At the sound of his voice the girl started forward. Her mouth parted, her eyes sparkled, her nostrils quivered. Nothing could have been more pathetic than this sudden ecstatic delight, as suddenly extinguished when she perceived that the exclamation was involuntary and not addressed to her. In a moment Sam Bolton appeared, striding out of the forest.

He unslung his little pack, leaned his rifle against a tree, consigned to May-may-gwán a dog he was leading, and approached the wigwam. He seemed in high good humour.

"Well, how goes it?" he greeted.

But at the sight of the man striding in his strength Dick's dull anger had fallen on him again like a blanket. Unreasonably, as he himself well knew, he was irritated. Something held him back from the utterance of the hearty words of greeting that had been on his tongue. A dull, apathetic in-

difference to everything except the chains of his imprisonment enveloped his spirit.

"All right," he answered, grudgingly.

Sam deftly unwound the bandages, examining closely the condition of the foot.

"Bone's in place all right," he commented. "Has the girl rubbed it and moved it every day?"

"Yes."

"Any pain to amount to anything now?"

"No."

"Pretty dull work lying on your back all day with nothing to do."

"Yes."

"Took in the country to southeast. Didn't find anything. Picked up a pretty good dog. Part 'husky.' "

Dick had no comment to make on this. Sam found May-may-gwán making friends with the dog, feeding him little scraps, patting his head, above all wrinkling the end of his pointed nose in one hand and batting it softly with the palm of the other. This caused the dog to sneeze violently, but he exhibited every symptom of enjoyment. The animal had long, coarse hair, sharp ears set alertly

forward, a bushy tail, and an expression of great but fierce intelligence.

"Eagle-eye does well," said the woodsman.

"I have done as the Little Father commanded," she replied, and arose to cook the meal.

The next day Sam constructed a pair of crutches well padded with moss.

"Listen, Little Sister," said he. "Now I go on a long journey, perhaps fifteen suns, perhaps one moon. At the end of six suns more Jibibánisi may rise. His leg must be slung, thus. Never must he touch the foot to the ground, even for an instant. You must see to it. I will tell him, also. Each day he must sit in the sun. He must do something. When snow falls we will again take the long trail. Prepare all things for it. Give Eagle-eye materials to work with."

To Dick he spoke with like directness.

"I'm off again, Dick," said he. "There's no help for it; you've got to lay up there for a week yet. Then the girl will show you how to tie your leg out of the way, and you can move on crutches. If you rest any weight on that foot before I get back, you'll be stiff for life. I shouldn't advise you

to take any chances. Suit yourself; but I should try to do no more than get out in the sun. You won't be good for much before snow. You can get things organised. She'll bring you the stuff to work on, and will help. So long."

"Good-by," muttered Dick. He breathed hard, fully occupied with the thought of his helplessness, with blind, unappeasable rage against the chance that had crippled him, with bitter and useless questionings as to why such a moment should have been selected for the one accident of his young life. Outside he could hear the crackle of the little fire, the unusual sound of the Indian girl's voice as she talked low to the dog, the animal's whine of appreciation and content. Suddenly he felt the need of companionship, the weariness of his own unending, revolving thoughts.

"Hi!" he called aloud.

May-may-gwán almost instantly appeared in the entrance, a scarcely concealed hope shining in her eyes. This was the first time she had been summoned.

"Ninny-moosh—the dog," commanded Dick, coldly.

She turned to whistle the beast. He came at once, already friends with this human being, who understood him.

"Come here, old fellow," coaxed Dick, holding out his hand.

But the half-wild animal was in doubt. He required assurance of this man's intentions. Dick gave himself to the task of supplying it. For the first time in a month his face cleared of its discontent. The old, winning boyishness returned. May-may-gwán, standing forgotten, in the entrance, watched in silence. Dick coaxed knowingly, leading, by the very force of persuasion, until the dog finally permitted a single pat of his sharp nose. The young man smoothly and cautiously persisted, his face alight with interest. Finally he conquered. The animal allowed his ears to be rubbed, his nose to be batted. At length, well content, he lay down by his new master within reach of the hand that rested caressingly on his head. The Indian girl stole softly away. At the fireside she seated herself and gazed in the coals. Presently the marvel of two tears welled in her eyes. She blinked them away and set about supper.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Whether it was that the prospect of getting about, or the diversion of the dog was responsible for the change, Dick's cheerfulness markedly increased in the next few days. For hours he would fool with the animal, whom he had named Billy, after a hunting companion, teaching him to shake hands, to speak, to wrinkle his nose in a doggy grin, to lie down at command, and all the other tricks useful and ornamental that go to make up the fanciest kind of a dog education. The mistakes and successes of his new friend seemed to amuse him hugely. Often from the tent burst the sounds of inextinguishable mirth. May-may-gwán, peeping, saw the young man as she had first seen him, clear-eyed, laughing, the wrinkles of humour deepening about his eyes, his white teeth flashing, his brow untroubled. Three days she hovered thus on the outer edge of the renewed good feeling, then timidly essayed an advance.

Unobtrusive, she slipped inside the teepee's flap. The dog sat on his haunches, his head to one side in expectation.

"The dog is a good dog," she said, her breath choking her.

Apparently the young man had not heard.

"It will be well to name the dog that he may answer to his name," she ventured again.

Dick, abruptly gripped by the incomprehensible obsession, uneasy as at something of which he only waited the passing, resentful because of the discomfort this caused him, unable to break through the artificial restraint that enveloped his spirit, lifted his eyes suddenly, dead and lifeless, to hers.

"It is time to lift the net," he said.

The girl made no more advances. She moved almost automatically about her accustomed tasks, preparing the materials for what remained to be done.

Promptly on the seventh day, with much preparation and precaution, Dick moved. He had now to suffer the girl's assistance. When he first stood upright, he was at once attacked by a severe dizziness, which would have caused a fall had not May-

may-gwán steadied him. With difficulty he hobbled to a seat outside. Even his arms seemed to him pithless. He sank to his place hard-breathed, exhausted. It was some minutes before he could look about him calmly.

The first object to catch his eye was the cardinal red of a moose-maple, like a spot of blood on velvet-green. And thus he knew that September, or the Many-caribou-in-the-woods Moon, was close at hand.

"Hi!" he called.

May-may-gwán came as before, but without the look of expectation in her eyes.

"Bring me wood of mashkigiwáteg, wood of tamarack," he commanded; "bring me mókamon, the knife, and tschì-mókamon, the large knife; bring the hide of ah-ték, the caribou."

"These things are ready, at hand," she replied.

With the *couteau croche*, the crooked knife of the North, Dick laboured slowly, fashioning with care the long tamarack strips. He was exceedingly particular as to the selection of the wood, as to the taper of the pieces. At last one was finished to his satisfaction. Slowly then he fashioned it, mould-

mg the green wood, steaming it to make it more plastic, until at last the ends lay side by side, and the loop of wood bowed above in the shape of a snow-shoe raquette. The exact shape Dick still further assured by means of two cross-pieces. These were bound in place by the strips of the caribou-skin rawhide wet in warm water, which was also used to bind together the two ends. The whole was then laid aside to dry.

Thus in the next few days Dick fashioned the frame of six snow-shoes. He adhered closely to the Ojibway pattern. In these woods it was not necessary to have recourse to the round, broad shape of the rough bowlder-hills, nor was it possible to use the long, swift shoe of the open plains. After a while he heated red the steel end of his rifle cleaning-rod and bored holes for the webbing. This also he made of caribou rawhide, for caribou shrinks when wet, thus tightening the lacing where other materials would stretch. Above and below the cross-pieces he put in a very fine weaving; between them a coarser, that the loose snow might readily sift through. Each strand he tested again and again; each knot he made doubly sure.

Nor must it be imagined that he did these things alone. May-may-gwán helped him, not only by fetching for him the tools and materials, of which he stood in need, but also in the bending, binding, and webbing itself. Under the soft light of the trees, bathed in the aroma of fresh shavings and the hundred natural odours of the forest, it was exceedingly pleasant accurately to accomplish the light skilled labour. But between these human beings, alone in a vast wilderness, was no communication outside the necessities of the moment. Thus in a little the three pairs of snow-shoes, complete even to the buckskin foot-loops, hung from the sheltered branch of a spruce.

"Bring now to me," said the young man, "poles of the hickory, logs of gijik, the cedar; bring me wigwass, the birch-bark, and the rawhide of moos-wa, the moose."

"These things are at hand," repeated May-may-gwán.

Then ensued days of severe toil. Dick was, of course, unable to handle the axe, so the girl had to do it under his direction. The affair was of wedges with which to split along the grain; of repeated at-

tempts until the resulting strips were true and without warp; of steaming and tying to the proper curve, and, finally, of binding together strongly with the tough *babiche* into the shape of the dog-sledge. This, too, was suspended at last beneath the sheltering spruce.

"Bring me now," said Dick, "rawhide of mooswa, the moose, rawhide of ah-tĕk, the caribou, wátab, the root for sewing."

Seated opposite each other, heads bent over the task, they made the dog-harness, strong, serviceable, not to be worn out, with the collar, the broad buck-skin strap over the back, the heavy traces. Four of them they made, for Sam would undoubtedly complete the team, and these, too, they hung out of reach in the spruce-tree.

Now Sam returned from his longest trip, empty of information, but light of spirit, for he had succeeded by his simple shrewdness in avoiding all suspicion. He brought with him another "husky" dog, and a strong animal like a Newfoundland; also some tea and tobacco, and an axe-blade. This latter would be especially valuable. In the extreme cold steel becomes like glass. The work done earned

his approval, but he paused only a day, and was off again.

From the inside of the teepee hung many skins of the northern hare which May-may-gwán had captured and tanned while Dick was still on his back. The woven blanket was finished. Now she lined the woollen blankets with these hare-skins, over an hundred to each. Nothing warmer could be imagined. Of caribou skin, tanned with the hair on, she and Dick fashioned jackets with peaked hoods, which, when not in use, would hang down behind. The opening about the face was sewn with bushy fox's tails, and a puckering-string threaded through so that the wearer could completely protect his features. Mittens they made from pelts of the muskrat. Moccasins were cut extra large and high, and lined with fur of the hare. Heavy rawhide dog-whips and buckskin gun-cases completed the simple winter outfit.

But still there remained the question of sustenance. Game would be scarce and uncertain in the cold months.

It was now seven weeks since Dick's accident. Cautiously, with many pauses, he began to rest

weight on the injured foot. Thanks to the treatment of massage and manipulation, the joint was but little stiffened. Each day it gained in strength. Shortly Dick was able to hobble some little distance, always with the aid of a staff, always heedfully. As yet he was far from the enjoyment of full freedom of movement, but by expenditure of time and perseverance he was able to hunt in a slow, patient manner. The runways where the caribou came to drink late in the evening, a cautious float downstream as far as the first rapids, or even a plain sitting on a log in the hope that game would chance to feed within range—these methods persisted in day after day brought in a fair quantity of meat.

Of the meat they made some jerky for present consumption by the dogs, and, of course, they ate fresh as much as they needed. But most went into pemmican. The fat was all cut away, the lean sliced thin and dried in the sun. The result they pounded fine, and mixed with melted fat and the marrow, which, in turn, was compressed while warm into air-tight little bags. A quantity of meat went into surprisingly little pemmican. The bags were

piled on a long-legged scaffolding out of the reach of the dogs and wild animals.

The new husky and Billy had promptly come to teeth, but Billy had held his own, much to Dick Herron's satisfaction. The larger animal was a bitch, so now all dwelt together in amity. During the still hunt they were kept tied in camp, but the rest of the time they prowled about. Never, however, were they permitted to leave the clearing, for that would frighten the game. At evening they sat in an expectant row, awaiting the orderly distribution of their evening meal. Somehow they added much to the man-feel of the camp. With their coming the atmosphere of men as opposed to the atmosphere of the wilderness had strengthened. On this side was the human habitation, busy at its own affairs, creating about itself a definite something in the forest, unknown before, preparing quietly and efficiently its weapons of offence and defence, all complete in its fires and shelters and industries and domestic animals. On the other, formidable, mysterious, vast, were slowly crystallising, without disturbance, without display, the mighty opposing forces. In the clarified air of the first autumn

frosts this antagonism seemed fairly to saturate the stately moving days. It was as yet only potential, but the potentialities were swelling, ever swelling toward the break of an actual conflict.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Now the leaves ripened and fell, and the frost crisped them. Suddenly the forest was still. The great, brooding silence, composed of a thousand lesser woods voices, flowed away like a vapour to be succeeded by a fragile, deathly suspension of sound. Dead leaves depended motionless from the trees. The air hung inert. A soft sunlight lay enervated across the world.

In the silence had been a vast, holy mystery of greater purpose and life; in the stillness was a menace. It became the instant of poise before the break of something gigantic.

And always across it were rising strange rustlings that might mean great things or little, but whose significance was always in doubt. Suddenly the man watching by the runway would hear a mighty scurrying of dead leaves, a scampering, a tumult of hurrying noises, the abruptness of whose inception tightened his nerves and set galloping his

heart. Then, with equal abruptness, they ceased. The delicate and fragile stillness settled down.

In all the forest thus diverse affairs seemed to be carried on—fearfully, in sudden, noisy dashes, as a man under fire would dodge from one cover to another. Every creature advertised in the leaves his presence. Danger lurked to this, its advantage. Even the man, taking his necessary footsteps, was abashed at the disproportionate and unusual effects of his movements. It was as though a retiring nature were to be accompanied at every step through a crowded drawing-room by the jingling of bells. Always the instinct was to pause in order that the row might die away, that the man might shrink to his accustomed unobtrusiveness. And instantaneously, without the grace of even a little transitional echo, the stillness fell, crowding so closely on the heels of the man's presence that almost he could feel the breath of whatever it represented.

Occasionally two red squirrels would descend from the spruce-trees to chase each other madly. Then, indeed, did the spirit of autumn seem to be outraged. The racket came to be an insult. Always the ear expected its discontinuance, until

finally the persistence ground on the nerves like the barking of a dog at night. At last it was an indecency, an orgy of unholy revel, a profanation, a provocative to anger of the inscrutable woods god. Then stillness again with the abruptness of a sword-cut.

Always the forest seemed to be the same; and yet somehow in a manner not to be defined a subtle change was taking place in the wilderness. Nothing definite could be instanced. Each morning of that Indian summer the skies were as soft, the sun as grateful, the leaves as gorgeous in their blazonment, yet each morning an infinitesimal something that had been there the day before was lacking, and for it an infinitesimal something had been substituted. The change from hour to hour was not perceptible; from week to week it was. The stillness grew in portent; the forest creatures moved more furtively. Like growth, rather than chemical change, the wilderness was turning to iron. With this hardening it became more formidable and menacing. No longer aloof in nirvanic calm, awakened it drew near its enemies, alert, cunning, circumspect, ready to strike.

Each morning a thin film of ice was to be seen along the edges of the slack water. Heavy, black frosts whitened the shadows and nipped the unaccustomed fingers early in the day. The sun was swinging to the south, lengthening the night hours. Whitefish were running in the river.

These last the man and the girl caught in great numbers, and smoked and piled on long-legged scaffolds. They were intended as winter food for the dogs, and would constitute a great part of what would be taken along when the journey should commence.

Dick began to walk without his crutches, a very little at a time, grimly, all his old objectless anger returned when the extent of his disability was thus brought home to him. But always with persistence came improvement. Each attempt brought its reward in strengthened muscles, freer joints, greater confidence. At last it could be no longer doubted that by the Indian's Whitefish Moon he would be as good as ever. The discovery, by some queer contrariness of the man's disposition, was avoided as long as possible, and finally but grudgingly admitted. Yet when at last Dick confessed to him-

self that his complete recovery was come, his mood suddenly changed. The old necessity for blind, unreasoning patience seemed at an end. He could perceive light ahead, and so in the absence of any further need for taut spiritual nerves, he relaxed the strain and strode on more easily. He played more with the dogs—of which still his favourite was Billy; occasionally he burst into little snatches of song, and the sound of his whistling was merry in the air. At length he paused abruptly in his work to fix his quizzical, narrow gaze on the Indian girl.

"Come, Little Sister," said he, "let us lift the nets."

She looked up at him, a warm glow leaping to her face. This was the first time he had addressed her by the customary diminutive of friendship since they had both been members of the Indian camp on the Missináibie.

They lifted the net together, and half-filled the canoe with the shining fish. Dick bore himself with the careless good humour of his earlier manner. The greater part of the time he seemed unconscious of his companion's presence, but genuinely uncon-

scious, not with the deliberate affront of a pretended indifference. Under even this negative good treatment the girl expanded with an almost luxuriant gratitude. Her face lost its stoical mask of imperturbability, and much of her former arch beauty returned. The young man was blind to these things, for he was in reality profoundly indifferent to the girl, and his abrupt change of manner could in no way be ascribed to any change in his feeling for her. It was merely the reflex of his inner mood, and that sprang solely from joy over the permission he had given himself again to contemplate taking the Long Trail.

But Sam Bolton, returning that very day from his own long journey, saw at once the alteration in May-may-gwán, and was troubled over it. He came into camp by the river way where the moss and spruce-needles silenced his footsteps, so he approached unnoticed. The girl bent over the fire. A strong glow from the flames showed the stronger glow illuminating her face from within. She hummed softly a song of the Ojibway language:

"Mong-o doog-win
Nin dinaindoon——"
"Loon's wing I thought it was
In the distance shining.
But it was my lover's paddle
In the distance shining."

Then she looked up and saw him.

"Little Father!" she cried, pleased.

At the same moment Dick caught sight of the new-comer and hobbled out of the wigwam.

"Hello, you old snoozer!" he shouted. "We began to think you weren't going to show up at all. Look at what we've done. I believe you've been lying out in the woods just to dodge work. Where'd you steal *that* dog?"

"Hello, Dick," replied Sam, unslinging his pack. "I'm tired. Tell her to rustle grub."

He leaned back against a cedar, half-closing his eyes, but nevertheless keenly alert. The changed atmosphere of the camp disturbed him. Although he had not realised it before, he preferred Dick's old uncompromising sulkiness.

In accordance with the woods custom, little was said until after the meal was finished and the pipes lit. Then Dick inquired:

"Well, where you been this time, and what did you find?"

Sam replied briefly as to his journey, making it clear that he had now covered all the hunting districts of this region with the single exception of one beyond the Kenógami. He had discovered nothing; he was absolutely sure that nothing was to be discovered.

"I didn't go entirely by what the Injuns told me," he said, "but I looked at the signs along the trapping routes and the trapping camps to see how many had been at it, and I'm sure the number tallies with the reg'lar Injun hunters. I picked up that dog over to Leftfoot Lake. Come here, pup!"

The animal slouched forward, his head hanging, the rims of his eyes blood red as he turned them up to his master. He was a powerful beast, black and tan, with a quaintly wrinkled, anxious countenance and long, pendent ears.

"Strong," commented Dick, "but queer-looking. He'll have trouble keeping warm with that short coat."

"He's wintered here already," replied Sam, indifferently. "Go lie down!"

The dog slouched slowly back, his heavy head and ears swinging to each step, to where May-may-gwán was keeping his peace with the other animals.

"Now for that Kenógami country," went on Sam; "it's two weeks from here by dogs, and it's our last chance in this country. I ain't dared ask too many questions, of course, so I don't know anything about the men who're hunting there. There's four families, and one other. He's alone; I got that much out of the last place I stopped. We got to wait here for snow. If we don't raise anything there, we'd better get over toward the Nipissing country."

"All right," said Dick.

The older man began to ask minutely concerning the equipment, provisions, and dog food.

"It's all right as long as we can take it easy and hunt," advised Sam, gradually approaching the subject that was really troubling him, "and it's all right if we can surprise this Jingoss or ambush him when we find him. But suppose he catches wind of us and skips, what then? It'll be a mighty pretty race, my son, and a hard one. We'll have to fly

light and hard, and we'll need every pound of grub we can scrape."

The young man's eyes darkened and his nostrils expanded with the excitement of this thought.

"Just let's strike his trail!" he exclaimed.

"That's all right," agreed the woodsman, his eyes narrowing; "but how about the girl, then?"

But Dick exhibited no uneasiness. He merely grinned broadly.

"Well, *what* about the girl? That's what I've been telling you. Strikes me that's one of your troubles."

Half-satisfied, the veteran fell silent. Shortly after he made an opportunity to speak to May-may-gwán.

"All is well, Little Sister?" he inquired.

"All is well," she replied; "we have finished the parkas, the sledges, the snow-shoes, the blankets, and we have made much food."

"And Jibiwánisi?"

"His foot is nearly healed. Yesterday he walked to the Big Pool and back. To-day, even this afternoon, Little Father, the Black Spirit left him so that he has been gay."

Convinced that the restored good feeling was the result rather of Dick's volatile nature than of too good an understanding, the old man left the subject.

"Little Sister," he went on, "soon we are going to take the winter trail. It may be that we will have to travel rapidly. It may be that food will be scarce. I think it best that you do not go with us."

She looked up at him.

"These words I have expected," she replied. "I have heard the speech you have made with the Ojibway men you have met. I have seen the preparations you have made. I am not deceived. You and Jibiwánisi are not looking for winter posts. I do not know what it is you are after, but it is something you wish to conceal. Since you have not told me, I know you wish to conceal it from me. I did not know all this when I left Haukemah and his people. That was a foolish thing. It was done, and I do not know why. But it was done, and it cannot be undone. I could not go back to the people of Haukemah now; they would kill me. Where else can I go? I do not know where the Ojibways, my own people, live."

"What do you expect to do, if you stay with me?" inquired Sam, curiously.

"You come from Conjuror's House. You tell the Indians you come from Winnipeg, but that is not so. When you have finished your affairs, you will return to Conjuror's House. There I can enter the household of some officer."

"But you cannot take the winter trail," objected Sam.

"I am strong; I can take the winter trail."

"And perhaps we may have to journey hard and fast."

"As when one pursues an enemy," said the girl, calmly. "Good. I am fleet. I too can travel. And if it comes to that, I will leave you without complaint when I can no longer tread your trail."

"But the food," objected Sam, still further.

"Consider, Little Father," said May-may-gwán; "of the food I have prepared much; of the work, I have done much. I have tended the traps, raised the nets, fashioned many things, attended Eagle-eye. If I had not been here, then you, Little Father, could not have made your journeys. So you have gained some time."

"That is true," conceded Sam.

"Listen, Little Father, take me with you. I will drive the dogs, make the camp, cook the food. Never will I complain. If the food gets scarce, I will not ask for my share. That I promise."

"Much of what you say is true," assented the woodsman, "but you forget you came to us of your free will and unwelcomed. It would be better that you go to Missinâibie."

"No," replied the girl.

"If you hope to become the squaw of Jibiwânisi," said Sam, bluntly, "you may as well give it up."

The girl said nothing, but compressed her lips to a straight line. After a moment she merely reiterated her original solution:

"At Conjuror's House I know the people."

"I will think of it," then concluded Sam.

Dick, however, could see no good in such an arrangement. He did not care to discuss the matter at length, but preserved rather the attitude of a man who has shaken himself free of all the responsibility of an affair, and is mildly amused at the tribulations of another still involved in it.

"You'll have a lot of trouble dragging a squaw

all over the north," he advised Sam, critically. "Of course, we can't turn her adrift here. Wouldn't do that to a dog. But it strikes me it would even pay us to go out of our way to Missináibie to get rid of her. We could do that."

"Well, I don't know—" doubted Sam. "Of course——"

"Oh, bring her along if you want to," laughed Dick, "only it's your funeral. You'll get into trouble, sure. And don't say I didn't tell you."

It might have been imagined by the respective attitudes of the two men that actually Sam had been responsible for the affair from the beginning. Finally, laboriously, he decided that the girl should go. She could be of assistance; there was small likelihood of the necessity for protracted hasty travel.

The weather was getting steadily colder. Greasy-looking clouds drove down from the northwest. Heavy winds swept by. The days turned gray. Under the shelter of trees the ground froze into hummocks, which did not thaw out. The crisp leaves which had made the forest so noisy disintegrated into sodden silence. A wildness was in the

air, swooping down with the breeze, buffeting in the little whirlwinds and eddies, rocking back and forth in the tops of the storm-beaten trees. Cold little waves lapped against the thin fringe of shore ice that crept day by day from the banks. The water itself turned black. Strange birds swirling down wind like leaves uttered weird notes of migration. The wilderness hardened to steel.

The inmates of the little camp waited. Each morning Dick was early afoot searching the signs of the weather; examining the ice that crept stealthily from shore, waiting to pounce upon and imprison the stream; speculating on the chances of an early season. The frost pinched his bare fingers severely, but he did not mind that. His leg was by now almost as strong as ever, and he was impatient to be away, to leave behind him this rapid that had gained over him even a temporary victory. Always as the time approached, his spirits rose. It would have been difficult to identify this laughing boy with the sullen and terrible man who had sulked through the summer. He had made friends with all the dogs. Even the fierce "huskies" had become tame, and liked to be upset and tousled about and

dragged on their backs growling fierce but mock protest. The bitch he had named Claire; the hound with the long ears he had called Mack, because of a fancied and mournful likeness to MacDonald, the Chief Trader; the other "husky" he had christened Wolf, for obvious reasons; and there remained, of course, the original Billy. Dick took charge of the feeding. At first he needed his short, heavy whip to preserve order, but shortly his really admirable gift with animals gained way, and he had them sitting peacefully in a row awaiting each his turn.

At last the skim ice made it impossible longer to use the canoe in fishing on the river. The craft was, therefore, suspended bottom up between two trees. A little snow fell and remained, but was speedily swept into hollows. The temperature lowered. It became necessary to assume thicker garments. Once having bridged the river the ice strengthened rapidly. And then late one afternoon, on the wings of the northwest wind, came the snow. All night it howled past the trembling wigwam. All the next day it swirled and drifted and took the shapes of fantastic monsters leaping in the

riot of the storm. Then the stars, cold and brilliant, once more crackled in the heavens. The wilderness in a single twenty-four hours had changed utterly. Winter had come.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In the starlit, bitter cold of a north country morning the three packed their sledge and harnessed their dogs. The rawhide was stubborn with the frost, the dogs uneasy. Knots would not tie. Pain nipped the fingers, cruel pain that ate in and in until it had exposed to the shock of little contacts every tightened nerve. Each stiff, clumsy movement was agony. From time to time one of the three thrust hand in mitten to beat the freezing back. Then a new red torture surged to the very finger-tips. They bore it in silence, working hastily, knowing that every morning of the long, winter trip this fearful hour must come. Thus each day the North would greet them, squeezing their fingers in the cruel hand-clasp of an antagonist testing their strength.

Over the supplies and blankets was drawn the skin envelope laced to the sledge. The last reluctant knot was tied. Billy, the leader of the four dogs, casting an intelligent eye at his masters, knew

that all was ready, and so arose from his haunches. Dick twisted his feet skilfully into the loops of his snow-shoes. Sam, already equipped, seized the heavy dog-whip. The girl took charge of the gee-pole with which the sledge would be guided.

"Mush! Mush on!" shouted Sam.

The four dogs leaned into their collars. The sledge creaked free of its frost anchorage and moved.

First it became necessary to drop from the elevation to the river-bed. Dick and May-may-gwán clung desperately. Sam exercised his utmost skill and agility to keep the dogs straight. The toboggan hovered an instant over the edge of the bank, then plunged, coasting down. Men hung back, dogs ran to keep ahead. A smother of light snow settled to show, in the dim starlight, the furrow of descent. And on the broad, white surface of the river were eight spots of black which represented the followers of the Long Trail.

Dick shook himself and stepped ahead of the dogs.

"Mush! Mush on!" commanded Sam again.

Dick ran on steadily in the soft snow, swinging his entire weight now on one foot, now on the other, passing the snow-shoes with the peculiar stiff swing of the ankle, throwing his heel strongly downward at each step in order to take advantage of the long snow-shoe tails' elasticity. At each step he sank deep into the feathery snow. The runner was forced to lift the toe of the shoe sharply, and the snow swirled past his ankles like foam. Behind him, in the trail thus broken and packed for them, trotted the dogs, their noses low, their jaws hanging. Sam drove with two long-lashed whips; and May-may-gwán, clinging to the gee-pole, guided the sledge.

In the absolute and dead stillness of a winter morning before the dawn the little train went like ghosts in a mist of starlight. The strange glimmering that seems at such an hour to disengage from the snow itself served merely to establish the separate bulks of that which moved across it. The bending figure of the man breaking trail, his head low, his body moving in its swing with the regularity of a pendulum; the four wolf-like dogs, also bending easily to what was not a great labour, the

line of their open jaws and lolling tongues cut out against the snow; another human figure; the low, dark mass of the sledge; and again the bending figure at the rear,—all these contrasted in their half-blurred uncertainty of outline and the suggested motion of their attitude with the straight, clear silhouette of the spruce-trees against the sky.

Also the sounds of their travelling offered an analogous contrast. The dull *crunch, crunch, crunch* of the snow-shoes, the breathing of the living beings, the glither and creak of the sledge came to the ear blurred and confused; utterly unlike the cameo stillness of the winter dawn.

Ten minutes of the really violent exertion of breaking trail warmed Dick through. His fingers ceased their protest. Each breath, blowing to steam, turned almost immediately to frost. He threw back the hood of his capote, for he knew that should it become wet from the moisture of his breath, it would freeze his skin, and with his violent exertions exposure to the air was nothing. In a short time his eyebrows and eyelashes became heavy with ice. Then slowly the moisture of his body, working outward through the wool of his clothing, frosted on

the surface, so that gradually as time went on he grew to look more and more like a great white-furred animal.

The driving here on the open river was comparatively easy. Except occasionally, the straight line could be adhered to. When it became necessary to avoid an obstruction, Sam gave the command loudly, addressing Billy as the lead dog.

"Hu, Billy!" he would cry.

And promptly Billy would turn to the right. Or:

"Chac, Billy!" he would cry.

And Billy would turn to the left, with always in mind the thought of the long whip to recall his duty to man.

Then the other dogs turned after him. Claire, for her steadiness and sense, had been made sledge-dog. Always she watched sagaciously to pull the end of the sledge strongly away should the deviation not prove sufficient. Later, in the woods, when the trail should become difficult, much would depend on Claire's good sense.

Now shortly, far to the south, the sun rose. The gray world at once became brilliant. The low frost

haze,—invisible until now, to be invisible all the rest of the day,—for these few moments of the level beams worked strange necromancies. The prisms of a million ice-drops on shrubs and trees took fire. A bewildering flash and gleam of jewels caught the eye in every direction. And, suspended in the air, like the shimmer of a soft and delicate veiling, wavered and floated a mist of vapour, tinted with rose and lilac, with amethyst and saffron.

As always on the Long Trail, our travellers' spirits rose with the sun. Dick lengthened his stride, the dogs leaned to their collars, Sam threw back his shoulders, the girl swung the sledge tail with added vim. Now everything was warm and bright and beautiful. It was yet too early in the day for fatigue, and the first discomforts had passed.

But in a few moments Dick stopped. The sledge at once came to a halt. They rested.

At the end of ten minutes Sam stepped to the front, and Dick took the dog-whip. The young man's muscles, still weak from their long inaction, ached cruelly. Especially was this true of the ligaments at the groin—used in lifting high the knee, —and the long muscles along the front of the shin-

bone,—by which the toe of the snow-shoe was elevated. He found himself very glad to drop behind into the beaten trail.

The sun by now had climbed well above the horizon, but did little to mitigate the cold. As long as the violent movement was maintained a warm and grateful glow followed the circulation, but a pause, even of a few moments, brought the shivers. And always the feathery, clogging snow,—offering slight resistance, it is true, but opposing that slight resistance continuously, so that at last it amounted to a great deal. A step taken meant no advance toward easier steps. The treadmill of forest travel, changed only in outward form, again claimed their dogged patience.

At noon they paused in the shelter of the woods. The dogs were anchored by the simple expedient of turning the sledge on its side. A little fire of dried spruce and pine branches speedily melted snow in the kettle, and that as speedily boiled tea. Caribou steak, thawed, then cooked over the blaze, completed the meal. As soon as it was swallowed they were off again before the cold could mount them.

The inspiration and uplift of the morning were

gone; the sun was sinking to a colder and colder setting. All the vital forces of the world were running down. A lethargy seized our travellers. An effort was required merely to contemplate treading the mill during the three remaining hours of daylight, a greater effort to accomplish the first step of it, and an infinite series of ever-increasing efforts to make the successive steps of that long afternoon. The mind became weary. And now the North increased by ever so little the pressure against them, sharpening the cold by a trifle; adding a few flakes' weight to the snow they must lift on their shoes; throwing into the vista before them a deeper, chillier tone of gray discouragement; intensifying the loneliness; giving to the winds of desolation a voice. Well the great antagonist knew she could not thus stop these men, but so, little by little, she ground them down, wore away the excess of their vitality, reduced them to grim plodding, so that at the moment she would hold them weakened to her purposes. They made no sign, for they were of the great men of the earth, but they bent to the familiar touch of many little fingers pushing them back.

Now the sun did indeed swing to the horizon, so that there remained scant daylight.

"Chac, Billy!" cried Sam, who again wielded the whip.

Slowly, wearily, the little party turned aside. In the grove of spruce the snow clung thick and heavy. A cold blackness enveloped them like a damp blanket. Wind, dying with the sun, shook the snow from the trees and cried mournfully in their tops. Gray settled on the landscape, palpable, real, extinguishing the world. It was the second dreadful hour of the day, the hour when the man, weary, discouraged, the sweat of travel freezing on him, must still address himself to the task of making a home in the wilderness.

Again the sledge was turned on its side. Dick and May-may-gwán removed their snow-shoes, and, using them as shovels, began vigorously to scrape and dig away the snow. Sam unstrapped the axe and went for firewood. He cut it with little tentative strokes, for in the intense cold the steel was almost as brittle as glass.

Now a square of ground flanked by high snow walls was laid bare. The two then stripped boughs

of balsam with which to carpet all one end of it. They unharnessed the dogs, and laid the sledge across one end of the clear space, covering it with branches in order to keep the dogs from gnawing the moose-skin wrapper. It was already quite dark.

But at this point Sam returned with fuel. At once the three set about laying a fire nearly across the end of the cleared space opposite the sledge. In a moment a tiny flame cast the first wavering shadows against the darkness. Silently the inimical forces of the long day withdrew.

Shortly the camp was completed. Before the fire, impaled on sticks, hung the frozen whitefish thawing out for the dogs. Each animal was to receive two. The kettle boiled. Meat sizzled over the coals. A piece of ice, whittled to a point, dripped drinking-water like a faucet. The snow-bank ramparts were pink in the glow. They reflected appreciably the heat of the fire, though they were not in the least affected by it, and remained flaky to the touch. A comfortable sizzling and frying and bubbling and snapping filled the little dome of firelight, beyond which was the wilderness. Weary with an immense fatigue the three lay back waiting for their

supper to be done. The dogs, too, waited patiently just at the edge of the heat, their bushy tails covering the bottoms of their feet and their noses, as nature intended. Only Mack, the hound, lacking this protection, but hardened to greater exposure, lay flat on his side, his paws extended to the blaze. They all rested quietly, worn out, apparently without the energy to move a single hair. But now Dick, rising, took down from its switch the first of the whitefish. Instantly every dog was on his feet. Their eyes glared yellow, their jaws slavered, they leaped toward the man who held the fish high above his head and kicked energetically at the struggling animals. Sam took the dog whip to help. Between them the food was distributed, two fish to a dog. The beasts took each his share to a place remote from the others and bolted it hastily, returning at once on the chance of a further distribution, or the opportunity to steal from his companions. After a little more roaming about, growling and suspicious sniffing, they again settled down one by one to slumber.

Almost immediately after supper the three turned in, first removing and hanging before the

fire the duffel and moccasins worn during the day. These were replaced by larger and warmer sleep moccasins lined with fur. The warm-lined coverings they pulled up over and around them completely, to envelop even their heads. This arrangement is comfortable only after long use has accustomed one to the half-suffocation; but it is necessary, not only to preserve the warmth of the body, but also to protect the countenance from freezing. At once they fell into exhausted sleep.

As though they had awaited a signal, the dogs arose and proceeded to investigate the camp. Nothing was too trivial to escape their attention. Billy found a tiny bit of cooked meat. Promptly he was called on to protect his discovery against a vigorous onslaught from the hound and the other husky. Over and over the fighting dogs rolled, snorting and biting, awakening the echoes of the forest, even trampling the sleepers, who, nevertheless, did not stir. In the mean time, Claire, uninvolved, devoured the morsel. The trouble gradually died down. One after another the animals dug themselves holes in the snow, where they curled up, their bushy tails over their noses and

their fore paws. Only Mack, the hound with the wrinkled face and long, pendent ears, unendowed with such protection, crept craftily between his sleeping masters.

Gradually the fire died to coals, then filmed to ashes. Hand in hand the cold and the darkness invaded the camp. As the firelight faded, objects showed dimly, growing ever more distinct through the dying glow—the snow-laden bushes, the pointed trees against a steel sky of stars. The little, artificial tumult of homely sound by which these men had created for the moment an illusion of life sank down under the unceasing pressure of the verities, so that the wilderness again flowed unobstructed through the forest aisles. With a last *pop* of coals the faint noise of the fire ceased. Then an even fainter noise slowly became audible, a crackling undertone as of silken banners rustling. And at once, splendid, barbaric, the mighty orgy of the winter-time aurora began.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

In a day or two Dick was attacked by the fearful *mal de raquette*, which tortures into knots the muscles of the leg below the knee; and by cramps that doubled him up in his blankets. This was the direct result of his previous inaction. He moved only with pain; and yet, by the stern north-country code, he made no complaint and moved as rapidly as possible. Each time he raised his knee a sharp pain stabbed his groin, as though he had been stuck by a penknife; each time he bent his ankle in the recover the *mal de raquette* twisted his calves, and stretched his ankle tendons until he felt that his very feet were insecurely attached and would drop off. During the evening he sat quiet, but after he had fallen asleep from the mere exhaustion of the day's toil, he doubled up, straightened out, groaned aloud, and spoke rapidly in the strained voice of one who suffers. Often he would strip his legs by the fire, in order that Sam could twist a cleft stick

vigorously about the affected muscles; which is the Indian treatment. As for the cramps, they took care of themselves. The day's journey was necessarily shortened until he had partly recovered, but even after the worst was over, a long tramp always brought a slight recurrence.

For the space of nearly ten weeks these people travelled thus in the region of the Kabinikágam. Sometimes they made long marches; sometimes they camped for the hunting; sometimes the great, fierce storms of the north drove them to shelter, snowed them under, and passed on shrieking. The wind opposed them. At first of little account, its very insistence gave it value. Always the stinging snow whirling into the face; always the eyes watering and smarting; always the unyielding opposition against which to bend the head; always the rush of sound in the ears,—a distraction against which the senses had to struggle before they could take their needed cognisance of trail and of game. An uneasiness was abroad with the wind, an uneasiness that infected the men, the dogs, the forest creatures, the very insentient trees themselves. It racked the nerves. In it the inimical Spirit of the North

seemed to find its plainest symbol; though many difficulties she cast in the way were greater to be overcome.

Ever the days grew shorter. The sun swung above the horizon, low to the south, and dipped back as though pulled by some invisible string. Slanting through the trees it gave little cheer and no warmth. Early in the afternoon it sank, silhouetting the pointed firs, casting across the snow long, crimson shadows, which faded into gray. It was replaced by a moon, chill and remote, dead as the white world on which it looked.

In the great frost continually the trees were splitting with loud, sudden reports. The cold had long since squeezed the last drops of moisture from the atmosphere. It was metallic, clear, hard as ice, brilliant as the stars, compressed with the freezing. The moon, the stars, the earth, the very heavens glistened like polished steel. Frost lay on the land thick as a coverlid. It hid the east like clouds of smoke. Snow remained unmelted two feet from the camp-fire.

And the fire alone saved these people from the enemy. If Sam stooped for a moment to adjust his

snow-shoe strap, he straightened his back with a certain reluctance,—already the benumbing preliminary to freezing had begun. If Dick, flipping his mitten from his hand to light his pipe, did not catch the fire at the second tug, he had to resume the mitten and beat the circulation into his hand before renewing the attempt, lest the ends of his fingers become frosted. Movement, always and incessantly, movement alone could keep going the vital forces on these few coldest days until the fire had been built to fight back the white death.

It was the land of ghosts. Except for the few hours at midday these people moved in the gloom and shadow of a nether world. The long twilight was succeeded by longer night, with its burnished stars, its dead moon, its unearthly aurora. On the fresh snow were the tracks of creatures, but in the flesh they glided almost invisible. The ptarmigan's bead eye alone betrayed him, he had no outline. The ermine's black tip was the only indication of his presence. Even the larger animals,—the caribou, the moose—had either turned a dull gray, or were so rimed by the frost as to have lost all appearance of solidity. It was ever a surprise to find

these phantoms bleeding red, to discover that their flesh would resist the knife. During the strife of the heavy northwest storms one side of each tree had become more or less plastered with snow, so that even their dark trunks flashed mysteriously into and out of view. In the entire world of the great white silence the only solid, enduring, palpable reality was the tiny sledge train crawling with infinite patience across its vastness.

White space, a feeling of littleness and impotence, twilight gloom, burnished night, bitter cold, unreality, phantasmagoria, ghosts like those which surged about Æneas, and finally clogging, white silence,—these were the simple but dreadful elements of that journey which lasted, without event, from the middle of November until the latter part of January.

Never in all that time was an hour of real comfort to be anticipated. The labours of the day were succeeded by the shiverings of the night. Exhaustion alone induced sleep; and the racking chill of early morning alone broke it. The invariable diet was meat, tea, and pemmican. Besides the resolution required for the day's journey and the

night's discomfort, was the mental anxiety as to whether or not game would be found. Discouragements were many. Sometimes with full anticipation of a good day's run, they would consume hours in painfully dragging the sledge over unexpected obstructions. At such times Wolf, always of an evil disposition, made trouble. Thus besides the resolution of spirit necessary to the work, there had to be pumped up a surplusage to meet the demands of difficult dog-driving. And when, as often happened, a band of the gray wolves would flank them within smelling distance, the exasperation of it became almost unbearable. Time and again Sam had almost forcibly to restrain Dick from using the butt of his whip on Wolf's head.

Nor could they treat themselves in the weary succession of days to an occasional visit with human beings. During the course of their journey they investigated in turn three of the four trapping districts of the Kabinikágam. But Sam's judgment advised that they should not show themselves to the trappers. He argued that no sane man would look for winter posts at this time of year, and it might

be difficult otherwise to explain the presence of white men. It was quite easy to read by the signs how many people were to be accounted for in each district, and then it was equally easy to ambush in a tree, during the rounds for examination of the traps, until their identities had all been established. It was necessary to climb a tree in order to escape discovery by the trapper's dog. Of course the trail of our travellers would be found by the trapper, but unless he actually saw them he would most probably conclude them to be Indians moving to the west. Accordingly Dick made long detours to intercept the trappers, and spent many cold hours waiting for them to pass, while Sam and the girl hunted in another direction to replenish the supplies. In this manner the frequenters of these districts had been struck from the list. No one of them was Jingoss. There remained but one section, and that the most northerly. If that failed, then there was nothing to do but to retrace the long, weary journey up the Kabinikágam, past the rapids where Dick had hurt himself, over the portage, down the Mattawishgina, across the Missinaíbie, on which they had started their travels, to the country of the

Nipissing. Discussing this possibility one rest-time, Dick said:

"We'd be right back where we started. I think it would pay us to go down to Brunswick House and get a new outfit. It's only about a week up the Missináibie." Then, led by inevitable association of ideas, "Wonder if those Crees had a good time? And I wonder if they've knocked our friend Ah-tek, the Chippewa, on the head yet? He was a bad customer."

"You better hope they have," replied Sam. "He's got it in for you."

Dick shrugged his shoulders and laughed easily.

"That's all right," insisted the older man; "just the same, an Injun never forgets and never fails to get even. You may think he's forgotten, but he's layin' for you just the same," and then, because they happened to be resting in the lea of a bank and the sun was at its highest for the day, Sam went on to detail one example after another from his wide observation of the tenacity with which an Indian pursues an obligation, whether of gratitude or enmity. "They'll travel a thousand miles to get even," he concluded. "They'll drop the most im-

portant business they got, if they think they have a good chance to make a killing. He'll run up against you some day, my son, and then you'll have it out."

"All right," agreed Dick, "I'll take care of him. Perhaps I'd better get organised; he may be laying for me around the next bend."

"I don't know what made us talk about it," said Sam, "but funnier things have happened to me."

Dick, with mock solicitude, loosened his knife.

But Sam had suddenly become grave. "I believe in those things," he said, a little fearfully. "They save a man sometimes, and sometimes they help him to get what he wants. It's a Chippewa we're after; it's a Chippewa we've been talkin' about. They's something in it."

"I don't know what you're driving at," said Dick.

"I don't know," confessed Sam, "but I have a kind of a hunch we won't have to go back to the Nipissing." He looked gropingly about, without seeing, in the manner of an old man.

"I hope your hunch is a good one," replied Dick. "Well, mush on!"

The little cavalcade had made barely a dozen steps in advance when Sam, who was leading, came to a dead halt.

"Well, what do you make of that?" he asked.

Across the way lay the trunk of a fallen tree. It had been entirely covered with snow, whose line ran clear and unbroken its entire length except at one point, where it dipped to a shallow notch.

"Well, what do you make of that?" Sam inquired again.

"What?" asked Dick.

Sam pointed to the shallow depression in the snow covering the prostrate tree-trunk.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Dick looked at his companion a little bewildered.

"Why, you must know as well as I do," he said, "somebody stepped on top of that log with snowshoes, and it's snowed since."

"Yes, but who?" insisted Sam.

"The trapper in this district, of course."

"Sure; and let me tell you this,—that trapper is the man we're after. That's his trail."

"How do you know?"

"I'm sure. I've got a hunch."

Dick looked sceptical, then impressed. After all, you never could tell what a man might not learn out in the Silent Places, and the old woodsman had grown gray among woods secrets.

"We'll follow the trail and find his camp," pursued Sam.

"You ain't going to ambush him?" inquired Dick.

"What's the use? He's the last man we have to

tend to in this district, anyway. Even if it shouldn't be Jingoss, we don't care if he sees us. We'll tell him we're travelling from York to Winnipeg. It must be pretty near on the direct line from here."

"All right," said Dick.

They set themselves to following the trail. As the only persistences of it through the last storm were to be found where the snow-shoes had left deep notches on the fallen timber, this was not an easy matter. After a time the affair was simplified by the dogs. Dick had been breaking trail, but paused a moment to tie his shoe. The team floundered ahead. After a moment it discovered the half-packed snow of the old trail a foot below the newer surface, and, finding it easier travel, held to it. Between the partial success at this, and an occasional indication on the tops of fallen trees, the woodsmen managed to keep the direction of the fore-runner's travel.

Suddenly Dick stopped short in his tracks.

"Look there!" he exclaimed.

Before them was a place where a man had camped for the night.

"He's travelling!" cried Sam.

This exploded the theory that the trail had been made by the Indian to whom the trapping rights of the district belonged. At once the two men began to spy here and there eagerly, trying to reconstruct from the meagre vestiges of occupation who the camper had been and what he had been doing.

The condition of the fire corroborated what the condition of the trail had indicated. Probably the man had passed about three days ago. The nature of the fire proclaimed him an Indian, for it was small and round, where a white man's is long and hot. He had no dogs; therefore his journey was short, for, necessarily, he was carrying what he needed on his back. Neither on the route nor here in camp were any indications that he had carried or was examining traps; so the conclusion was that this trip was not merely one of the long circles a trapper sometimes makes about the limits of his domain. What, then, was the errand of a single man, travelling light and fast in the dead of winter?

"It's the man we're after," said Sam, with con-

viction. "He's either taken the alarm, or he's visiting."

"Look," called the girl from beneath the wide branches of a spruce.

They went. Beneath a lower limb, whose fan had protected it from the falling snow, was the single clear print of a snow-shoe.

"Hah!" cried Sam, in delight, and fell on his knees to examine it. At the first glance he uttered another exclamation of pleasure, for, though the shoe had been of the Ojibway pattern, in certain modifications it suggested a more northerly origin. The toes had been craftily upturned, the tails shortened, the webbing more closely woven.

"It's Ojibway," induced Sam, over his shoulder, "but the man who made it has lived among the Crees. That fits Jingoss. Dick, it's the man we're after!"

It was by now almost noon. They boiled tea at the old camp site, and tightened their belts for a stern chase.

That afternoon the head wind opposed them, exasperating, tireless in its resistance, never lulling for a single instant. At the moment it seemed more

than could be borne. Near one o'clock it did them a great despite, for at that hour the trail came to a broad and wide lake. There the snow had fallen, and the wind had drifted it so that the surface of the ice was white and smooth as paper. The faint trail led accurately to the bank—and was obliterated.

Nothing remained but to circle the shores to right and to left until the place of egress was discovered. This meant long work and careful work, for the lake was of considerable size. It meant that the afternoon would go, and perhaps the day following, while the man whose footsteps they were following would be drawing steadily away.

It was agreed that May-may-gwán should remain with the sledge, that Dick should circle to the right, and Sam to the left, and that all three should watch each other carefully for a signal of discovery.

But now Sam happened to glance at Mack, the wrinkle-nosed hound. The sledge had been pulled a short distance out on the ice. Mack, alternately whining and sniffing, was trying to induce his comrades to turn slanting to the left.

"What's the matter with that dog?" he inquired on a sudden.

"Smells something; what's the difference? Let's get a move on us," replied Dick, carelessly.

"Hold on," ordered Sam.

He rapidly changed the dog-harness in order to put Mack in the lead.

"Mush! Mush on!" he commanded.

Immediately the hound, his nose low, uttered a deep, bell-like note and struck on the diagonal across the lake.

"Come on," said Sam; "he's got it."

Across the white waste of the lake, against the bite of the unobstructed wind, under the shelter of the bank opposite they ran at slightly accelerated speed, then without pause into the forest on the other side.

"Look," said the older woodsman, pointing ahead to a fallen trunk. It was the trail.

"That was handy," commented Dick, and promptly forgot about it. But Sam treasured the incident for the future.

And then, just before two o'clock, the wind did them a great service. Down the long, straight lines

of its flight came distinctly the creak of snow-shoes. Evidently the traveller, whoever he might be, was retracing his steps.

At once Sam overturned the sledge, thus anchoring the dogs, and Dick ran ahead to conceal himself. May-may-gwán offered a suggestion.

"The dogs may bark too soon," said she.

Instantly Sam was at work binding fast their jaws with buckskin thongs. The girl assisted him. When the task was finished he ran forward to join Dick, hidden in the bushes.

Eight months of toil focussed in the moment. The faint creaking of the shoes came ever louder down the wind. Once it paused. Dick caught his breath. Had the traveller discovered anything suspicious? He glanced behind him.

"Where's the girl?" he hissed between his teeth. "Damn her, she's warned him!"

But almost with Sam's reply the creaking began again, and after an instant of indetermination continued its course.

Then suddenly the woodsmen, with a simultaneous movement, raised their rifles, and with equal

unanimity lowered them, gasping with astonishment. Dick's enemy, Ah-tek, the renegade Chippewa of Haukemah's band on the Missináibie, stepped from the concealment of the bushes.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Of the three the Indian was the first to recover.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'," said he, calmly.

Sam collected himself to a reply. Dick said nothing, but fell behind, with his rifle across his arm. All marched on in silence to where lay the dog-sledge, guarded by May-may-gwán. The Chippewa's keen eyes took in every detail of the scene, the overturning of the sledge, the muzzling of the dogs, the general nature of the equipment. If he made any deductions, he gave no sign, nor did he evince any further astonishment at finding these men so far north at such a time of year. Only, when he thought himself unobserved, he cast a glance of peculiar intelligence at the girl, who, after a moment's hesitation, returned it.

The occasion was one of elaborate courtesy. Sam ordered tea boiled, and offered his tobacco. Over the fire he ventured a more direct inquiry than his customary policy would have advised.

"My brother is a long journey from the Missináibie."

The Chippewa assented.

"Haukemah, then, hunts these districts."

The Chippewa replied no.

"My brother has left Haukemah."

Again the Chippewa denied, but after enjoying for a moment the baffling of the old man's intentions, he volunteered information.

"The trapper of thi district is my brother. I have visited him."

"It was a short visit for so long a journey. The trail is but three days old."

Ah-tek assented gravely. Evidently he cared very little whether or not his explanation was accepted.

"How many days to Winnipeg?" asked Sam.

"I have never been there," replied the Indian.

"We have summered in the region of the Missináibie," proffered Sam. "Now we go to Winnipeg."

The Indian's inscrutable countenance gave no indication as to whether or not he believed this. After a moment he knocked the ashes from his pipe

and arose, casting another sharp glance at May-may-gwán. She had been busy at the sledge. Now she approached, carrying simply her own blankets and clothing.

"This man," said she to the two, "is of my people. He returns to them. I go with him."

The Chippewa twisted his feet into his snow-shoes, nodded to the white men, and swung away on the back trail in the direction whence our travellers had come. The girl, without more leave-taking, followed close at his back. For an instant the crunch of shoes splintered the frosty air. Then they rounded a bend. Silence fell swift as a hawk.

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Dick at last. "Do you think he was really up here visiting?"

"No, of course not," replied Sam. "Don't you see——"

"Then he came after the girl?"

"Good God, *no!*" answered Sam. "He——"

"Then he was after me," interrupted Dick again with growing excitement. "Why didn't you let me shoot him, Sam——"

"Will you shut up and listen to me?" demanded the old man, impatiently. "If he'd wanted you,

he'd have got you when you were hurt last summer; and if he'd wanted the girl, he'd have got her then, too. It's all clear to me. He *has* been visiting a friend,—perhaps his brother, as he said,—and he did spend less than three days in the visit. What did he come for? Let me tell you! That friend, or brother, is Jingoss, and he came up here to warn him that we're after him. The Chippewa suspected us a little on the Missináibie, but he wasn't sure. Probably he's had his eye on us ever since."

"But why didn't he warn this Jingoss long ago, then?" objected Dick.

"Because we fooled him, just as we fooled all the Injuns. We *might* be looking for winter posts, just as we said. And then if he came up here and told Jingoss we were after him, when really we didn't know beans about Jingoss and his steals, and then this Jingoss should skip the country and leave an almighty good fur district all for nothing, that would be a nice healthy favour to do for a man, wouldn't it! No, he had to be *sure* before he made any moves. And he didn't get to be sure until he heard somehow from some one who saw our trails that three people were travelling in the winter up

through this country. Then he piked out to warn Jingoss."

"I believe you're right!" cried Dick.

"Of course I'm right. And another thing; if that's the case we're pretty close there. How many more trappers are there in this district? Just one! And since this Chippewa is going back on his back trail within three days after he made it, he couldn't have gone farther than that one man. And that one man must be——"

"Jingoss himself!" finished Dick.

"Within a day and a half of us, anyway; probably much closer," supplemented Sam. "It's as plain as a sledge-trail."

"He's been warned," Dick reminded him.

But Sam, afire with the inspiration of inductive reasoning, could see no objection there.

"This Chippewa knew we were in the country," he argued, "but he hadn't any idea we were so close. If he had, he wouldn't have been so foolish as to follow his own back track when he was going out. I don't know what his ideas were, of course, but he was almighty surprised to see us here. He's warned this Jingoss, not more than a day or so ago. But

he didn't tell him to skedaddle at once. He said, 'Those fellows are after you, and they're moseying around down south of here, and probably they'll get up here in the course of the winter. You'd probaply better slide out 'till they get done.' Then he stayed a day and smoked a lot, and started back. Now, if Jingoss just thinks we're coming *some time*, and not to-morrow, he ain't going to pull up stakes in such a hell of a hurry. He'll pack what furs he's got, and he'll pick up what traps he's got out. That would take him several days, anyway. My son, we're in the nick of time!"

"Sam, you're a wonder," said Dick, admiringly. "I never could have thought all that out."

"If that idea's correct," went on Sam, "and the Chippewa's just come from Jingoss, why we've got the Chippewa's trail to follow back, haven't we?"

"Sure!" agreed Dick, "all packed and broken."

They righted the sledge and unbound the dogs' jaws.

"Well, we got rid of the girl," said Dick, casually. "Damn little fool. I didn't think she'd leave us that easy. She'd been with us quite a while."

"Neither did I," admitted Sam; "but it's natural,

Dick. We ain't her people, and we haven't treated her very well, and I don't wonder she was sick of it and took the first chance back. We've got our work cut out for us now, and we're just as well off without her."

"The Chippewa's a sort of public benefactor all round," said Dick.

The dogs yawned prodigiously, stretching their jaws after the severe muzzling. Sam began reflectively to undo the flaps of the sledge.

"Guess we'd better camp here," said he. "It's getting pretty late and we're due for one hell of a tramp to-morrow."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Some time during the night May-may-gwán rejoined them. Sam was awakened by the demonstration of the dogs, at first hostile, then friendly with recognition. He leaped to his feet, startled at the apparition of a human figure. Dick sat up alert at once. The fire had almost died, but between the glow of its embers and the light of the aurora sifted through the trees they made her out.

"Oh, for God's *sake!*" snarled Dick, and lay back again in his blankets, but in a moment resumed his sitting position. "She made her choice," he proffered vehemently, "make her stick to it! Make her stick to it. She can't change her mind every other second like this, and we don't *need* her!"

But Sam, piling dry wood on the fire, looked in her face.

"Shut up, Dick," he commanded sharply. "Something in this."

The young man stared at his companion an enigmatical instant, hesitating as to his reply.

"Oh, all right," he replied at last with ostentatious indifference. "I don't give a damn. Don't sit up too late with the young lady. Good night!" He disappeared beneath his coverings, plainly disgruntled, as, for a greater or less period of time, he always was when even the least of his plans or points of view required readjustment.

Sam boiled tea, roasted a caribou steak, knelt and removed the girl's damp foot-gear and replaced it with fresh. Then he held the cup to her lips, cut the tough meat for her with his hunting-knife, even fed her as though she were a child. He piled more wood on the fire, he wrapped about her shoulders one of the blankets with the hare-skin lining. Finally, when nothing more remained to be done, he lit his pipe and squatted on his heels close to her, lending her mood the sympathy of human silence.

She drank the tea, swallowed the food, permitted the change of her foot-gear, bent her shoulders to the blanket, all without the appearance of consciousness. The corners of her lips were bent firmly

downward. Her eyes, fixed and exalted, gazed beyond the fire, beyond the dancing shadows, beyond the world. After a long interval she began to speak, low-voiced, in short disconnected sentences.

"My brothers seek the Ojibway, Jingoss. They will take him to Conjuror's House. But Jingoss knows that my brothers come. He has been told by Ah-tek. He leaves the next sun. He is to travel to the west, to Peace River. Now his camp is five hours to the north. I know where it is. Jingoss has three dogs. He has much meat. He has no gun but the trade-gun. I have learned this. I come to tell it to my brothers."

"Why, May-may-gwán?" inquired Sam, gently.

She turned on him a look of pride.

"Have you thought I had left you for him?" she asked. "I have learned these things."

Sam uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"What?" she queried with a slow surprise.

"But he, the Chippewa," Sam pointed out, "now he knows of our presence. He will aid Jingoss; he will warn him afresh to-night!"

May-may-gwán was again rapt in sad but ex-

alted contemplation of something beyond. She answered merely by a contemptuous gesture.

"But—" insisted Sam.

"I know," she replied, with conviction.

Sam, troubled he knew not why, leaned forward to arrange the fire.

"How do you know, Little Sister?" he inquired, after some hesitation.

She answered by another weary gesture. Again Sam hesitated.

"Little Sister," said he, at last, "I am an old man. I have seen many years pass. They have left me some wisdom. They have made my heart good to those who are in trouble. If it was not to return to your own people, then why did you go with Ah-tek this morning?"

"That I might know what my brothers wished to know."

"And you think he told you all these things truly?" doubted Sam.

She looked directly at him.

"Little Father," said she slowly, "long has this man wanted me to live in his wigwam. For that he joined Haukemah's band;—because I was there.

I have been good in his eyes. Never have I given him favour. My favour always would unlock his heart."

"But are you sure he spoke truth," objected Sam. "You have never looked kindly on him. You left Haukemah's band to go with us. How could he trust you?"

She looked at him bravely.

"Little Father," she replied, "there is a moment when man and woman trust utterly, and when they say truly what lies in their hearts."

"Good God!" cried Sam, in English.

"It was the only way," she answered the spirit of his interjection. "I had known before only his forked tongue."

"Why did you do this, girl? You had no right, no reason. You should have consulted us."

"Little Father," said she, "the people of your race are a strange people. I do not understand them. An evil is done them, and they pass it by; a good is done them, and they do not remember. With us it is different. Always in our hearts dwell the good and the evil."

"What good have we done to you?" asked Sam.

"Jibiwánisi has looked into my heart," she replied, lapsing into the Indian rhetoric of deep emotion. "He has looked into my heart, and in the doorway he blots out the world. At the first I wanted to die when he would not look on me with favour. Then I wanted to die when I thought I should never possess him. Now it is enough that I am near him, that I lay his fire, and cook his tea and caribou, that I follow his trail, that I am ready when he needs me, that I can raise my eyes and see him breaking the trail. For when I look up at him the sun breaks out, and the snow shines, and there is a light under the trees. And when I think of raising my eyes, and he not there, nor anywhere near, then my heart freezes, Little Father, freezes with loneliness."

Abruptly she arose, casting aside the blanket and stretching her arms rigid above her head. Then with equal abruptness she stooped, caught up her bedding, spread it out, and lay down stolidly to rest, turning her back to both the white men.

But Sam remained crouched by the fire until the morning hour of waking, staring with troubled eyes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Later in the morning Dick attempted some remark on the subject of the girl's presence. At once Sam whirled on him with a gust of passion utterly unlike his ordinary deliberate and even habit.

"Shut your damned mouth!" he fairly shouted.

Dick whistled in what he thought was a new enlightenment, and followed literally the other's vigorous advice. Not a syllable did he utter for an hour, by which time the sun had risen. Then he stopped and pointed to a fresh trail converging into that they were following.

The prints of two pairs of snow-shoes joined; those of one returned.

Sam gasped. Dick looked ironical. The interpretation was plain without the need of words. The Chippewa and the girl, although they had started to the southeast, had made a long detour in order again to reach Jingoss. These two pairs of snow-shoe tracks marked where they had considered it

safe again to strike into the old trail made by the Chippewa in going and coming. The one track showed where Ah-tek had pushed on to rejoin his friend; the other was that of the girl returning for some reason the night before, perhaps to throw them off the scent.

"Looks as if they'd fooled you, and fooled you good," said Dick, cheerfully.

For a single instant doubt drowned Sam's faith in his own insight and in human nature.

"Dick," said he, quietly, "raise your eyes."

Not five rods farther on the trail the two had camped for the night. Evidently Ah-tek had discovered his detour to have lasted out the day, and, having satisfied himself that his and his friend's enemies were not ahead of him, he had called a halt. The snow had been scraped away, the little fire built, the ground strewn with boughs. So far the indications were plain and to be read at a glance. But upright in the snow were two snow-shoes, and tumbled on the ground was bedding.

Instantly the two men leaped forward. May-may-gwán, her face stolid and expressionless, but her eyes glowing, stood straight and motionless by

the dogs. Together they laid hold of the smoothly spread top blanket and swept it aside. Beneath was a jumble of warmer bedding. In it, his fists clenched, his eyes half open in the horrific surprise of a sudden calling, lay the Chippewa stabbed to the heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The silence of the grave lay over the white world. Deep in the forest a tree detonated with the frost. There by the cold last night's camp the four human figures posed, motionless as a wind that has died. Only the dogs, lolling, stretching, sending the warm steam of their breathing into the dead air, seemed to stand for the world of life, and the world of sentient creatures. And yet their very presence, unobtrusive in the forest shadows, by contrast thrust farther these others into the land of phantoms and of ghosts.

Then quietly, as with one consent, the three living ones turned away. The older woodsman stepped into the trail, leading the way for the dogs; the younger woodsman swung in behind at the gee-pole; the girl followed. Once more, slowly, as though reluctant, the forest trees resumed their silent progress past those three toiling in the treadmill of the days. The camp dropped back; it con-

fused itself in the frost mists; it was gone, gone into the mystery and the vastness of the North, gone with its tragedy and its symbol of the greatness of human passion, gone with its one silent watcher staring at the sky, awaiting the coming of day. The frost had mercifully closed again about its revelation. No human eye would ever read that page again.

Each of the three seemed wrapped in the splendid isolation of his own dream. They strode on sightless, like somnambulists. Only mechanically they kept the trail, and why they did so they could not have told. No coherent thoughts passed through their brains. But always the trees, frost-rimed, drifted past like phantoms; always the occult influences of the North loomed large on their horizon like mirages, dwindled in the actuality, but threatened again in the bigness of mystery when they had passed. The North was near, threatening, driving the terror of her tragedy home to the hearts of these staring mechanical plodders, who now travelled they knew not why, farther and farther into the depths of dread.

But the dogs stopped, and Billy, the leader,

sniffed audibly in inquiry of what lay ahead. Instantly, in the necessity for action, the spell broke. The mystery which had lain so long at their horizon, which but now had crept in, threatening to smother them, rolled back to its accustomed place. The north withheld her hand.

Before them was another camp, one that had been long used. A conical tepee or wigwam, a wide space cleared of snow, much débris, racks and scaffolds for the accommodation of supplies, all these attested long occupancy.

Sam jerked the cover from his rifle, and cast a hasty glance at the nipple to see if it was capped. Dick jumped forward and snatched aside the opening into the wigwam.

"Not at home!" said he.

"Gone," corrected Sam, pointing to a fresh trail beyond.

At once the two men turned their attention to this. After some difficulty they established the fact of a three-dog team. Testing the consistency of the snow they proved a heavy load on the toboggan.

"I'm afraid that means he's gone for good," said Sam.

A further examination of camp corroborated this. The teepee had been made double, with the space between the two walls stuffed with moss, so evidently it had been built as permanent winter quarters. The fact of its desertion at this time of year confirmed the reasoning as to the identity of its occupant and the fact of his having been warned by the dead Chippewa. Skulls of animals indicated a fairly prosperous fur season. But the skulls of animals, a broken knife, a pile of balsam-boughs, and the deserted wigwam were all that remained. Jingoss had taken with him his traps, his pelts, his supplies.

"That's a good thing," concluded Sam, "a mighty good thing. It shows he ain't much scared. He don't suspect we're anywhere's near him; only that it ain't very healthy to spend the winter in this part of the country. If he'd thought we was close, he wouldn't have lugged along a lot of plunder; he'd be flying mighty light."

"That's right," agreed Dick.

"And in that case he isn't travelling very fast. We'll soon catch up."

"He only left this morning," supplemented

Dick, examining the frost-crystals in the new-cut trail.

Without wasting further attention, they set out in pursuit. The girl followed. Dick turned to her.

"I think we shall catch him very soon," said he, in Ojibway.

The girl's face brightened and her eyes filled. The simple words admitted her to confidence, implied that she, too, had her share in the undertaking, her interest in its outcome. She stepped forward with winged feet of gladness.

Luckily a light wind had sprung up against them. They proceeded as quietly and as swiftly as they could. In a short time they came to a spot where Jingoss had boiled tea. This indicated that he must have started late in the morning to have accomplished only so short a distance before noon. The trail, too, became fresher.

Billy, the regular lead dog, on this occasion occupied his official position ahead, although, as has been pointed out, he was sometimes alternated with the hound, who now ran just behind him. Third trotted Wolf, a strong beast, but a stupid; then Claire, at the sledge, sagacious, alert, ready to turn

the sledge from obstruction. For a long time all these beasts, with the strange intelligence of animals much associated with man, had entertained a strong interest in the doings of their masters. Something besides the day's journey was in the wind. They felt it through their keen instinctive responsiveness to the moods of those over them; they knew it by the testimony of their bright eyes which told them that these investigations and pryings were not all in an ordinary day's travel. Investigations and pryings appeal to a dog's nature. Especially did Mack, the hound, long to be free of his harness that he, too, might sniff here and there in odd nooks and crannies, testing with that marvellously keen nose of his what his masters regarded so curiously. Now at last he understood from the frequent stops and examinations that the trail was the important thing. From time to time he sniffed of it deeply, saturating his memory with the quality of its effluvia. Always it grew fresher. And then at last the warm animal scent rose alive to his nostrils, and he lifted his head and bayed.

The long, weird sound struck against the silence with the impact of a blow. Nothing more undesira-

ble could have happened. Again Mack bayed, and the echoing bell tones of his voice took on a strange similarity to a tocsin of warning. Rustling and crackling across the men's fancies the influences of the North moved invisible, alert, suddenly roused.

Dick whirled with an exclamation, throwing down and back the lever of his Winchester, his face suffused, his eye angry.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Bolton, anticipating his intention, and springing forward in time to strike up the muzzle of the rifle, though not soon enough to prevent the shot.

Against the snow, plastered on a distant tree, the bullet hit, scattering the fine powder; then ricochetted, shrieking with increasing joy as it mounted the upper air. After it, as though released by its passage from the spell of the great frost, trooped the voices and echoes of the wilderness. In the still air such a racket would carry miles.

Sam looked from the man to the dog.

"Well, between the two of you!" said he.

Dick sprang forward, lashing the team with his whip.

"After him!" he shouted.

They ran in a swirl of light snow. In a very few moments they came to a bundle of pelts, a little pile of traps, the unnecessary impediments discarded by the man they pursued. So near had they been to a capture.

Sam, out of breath, peremptorily called a halt.

"Hold on!" he commanded. "Take it easy. We can't catch him like this. He's travelling light, and he's one man, and he has a fresh team. He'll pull away from us too easy, and leave us with worn-out dogs." The old man sat and deliberately filled his pipe.

Dick fumed up and down, chafing at the delay, convinced that something should be done immediately, but at a loss to tell what it should be.

"What'll we do, then?" he asked, after a little.

"He leaves a trail, don't he?" inquired Sam. "We must follow it."

"But what good—how can we ever catch up?"

"We've got to throw away our traps and extra duffle. We've got to travel as fast as we can without wearing ourselves out. He may try to go too fast, and so we may wear him down. It's our only show, anyway. If we lose him now, we'll

never find him again. That trail is all we have to go by."

"How if it snows hard? It's getting toward spring storms."

"If it snows hard—well—" The old man fell silent, puffing away at his pipe. "One thing I want you to understand," he continued, looking up with a sudden sternness, "don't you ever take it on yourself to shoot that gun again. We're to take that man alive. The noise of the shot to-day was a serious thing; it gave Jingoss warning, and perhaps spoiled our chance to surprise him. But he might have heard us anyway. Let that go. But if you'd have killed that hound as you started out to do, you'd have done more harm than your fool head could straighten out in a lifetime. That hound—why—he's the best thing we've got. I'd—I'd almost rather lose our rifles than him—" he trailed off again into rumination.

Dick, sobered as he always was when his companion took this tone, inquired why, but received no answer. After a moment Sam began to sort the contents of the sledge, casting aside all but the necessities.

"What's the plan?" Dick ventured.

"To follow."

"How long do you think it will be before we catch him?"

"God knows."

The dogs leaned into their harness, almost falling forward at the unexpected lightness of the load. Again the little company moved at measured gait. For ten minutes nothing was said. Then Dick:

"Sam," he said, "I think we have just about as much chance as a snowball in hell."

"So do I," agreed the old woodsman, soberly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

They took up the trail methodically, as though no hurry existed. At the usual time of the evening they camped. Dick was for pushing on an extra hour or so, announcing himself not in the least tired, and the dogs fresh, but Sam would have none of it.

"It's going to be a long, hard pull," he said. "We're not going to catch up with him to-day, or to-morrow, or next day. It ain't a question of whether you're tired or the dogs are fresh to-night; it's a question of how you're going to be a month from now."

"We won't be able to follow him a month," objected Dick.

"Why?"

"It'll snow, and then we'll lose th' trail. The spring snows can't be far off now. They'll cover it a foot deep."

"Mebbe," agreed Sam, inconclusively.

"Besides," pursued Dick, "he'll be with his own

people in less than a month, and then there won't be any trail to follow."

Whereupon Sam looked a little troubled, for this, in his mind, was the chief menace to their success. If Jingoss turned south to the Lake Superior country, he could lose himself among the Ojibways of that region; and, if all remained true to him, the white men would never again be able to get trace of him. *If all remained true to him:*—on the chance of that Sam was staking his faith. The Honourable the Hudson's Bay Company has been established a great many years; it has always treated its Indians justly; it enjoys a tremendous prestige for infallibility. The bonds of race are strong, but the probabilities were good that in the tribes with whom Jingoss would be forced to seek sanctuary would be some members whose loyalty to the Company would out-balance the rather shadowy obligation to a man they had never seen before. Jingoss might be betrayed. The chances of it were fairly good. Sam Bolton knew that the Indian must be perfectly aware of this, and doubted if he would take the risk. A single man with three dogs ought to run away from three pursuers with only four. Therefore,

the old woodsman thought himself justified in relying at least on the meagre opportunity a stern chase would afford.

He did not know where the Indian would be likely to lead him. The checker-board of the wilderness lay open. As he had before reflected, it would be only too easy for Jingoss to keep between himself and his pursuers the width of the game. The Northwest was wide; the plains great; the Rocky Mountains lofty and full of hiding-places,—it seemed likely he would turn west. Or the deep forests of the other coast offered unlimited opportunities of concealment,—the east might well be his choice. It did not matter particularly. Into either it would not be difficult to follow; and Sam hoped in either to gain a sight of his prize before the snow melted.

The Indian, however, after the preliminary twists and turns of indecision, turned due north. For nearly a week Sam thought this must be a ruse, or a cast by which to gain some route known to Jingoss. But the forests began to dwindle; the muskegs to open. The Land of Little Sticks could not be far distant, and beyond them was the Barren Grounds.

The old woodsman knew the defaulter for a reckless and determined man. Gradually the belief, and at last the conviction, forced itself on him that here he gamed with no cautious player. The Indian was laying on the table the stakes of life or death. He, too, had realised that the test must be one of endurance, and in the superbness of his confidence he had determined not to play with preliminary half measures, but to apply at once the supreme test to himself and his antagonists. He was heading directly out into the winter desert, where existed no game but the single big caribou herd whose pastures were so wide that to meet them would be like encountering a single school of dolphins in all the seven seas.

As soon as Sam discovered this, he called Dick's attention to it.

"We're in for it," said he, "he's going to take us out on the Barren Grounds and lose us."

"If he can," supplemented Dick.

"Yes, if he can," agreed Sam. After a moment he went on, pursuing his train of thought aloud, as was his habit.

"He's thinking he has more grub than we have;

that's about what it amounts to. He thinks he can tire us out. The chances are we'll find no more game. We've got to go on what we have. He's probably got a sledge-load;—and so have we;—but he has only one to feed, and three dogs, and we have three and four dogs."

"That's all right; he's our Injun," replied Dick, voicing the instinct of race superiority which, after all, does often seem to accomplish the impossible. "It's too bad we have the girl with us," he added, after a moment.

"Yes, it is," agreed Sam. Yet it was most significant that now it occurred to neither of them that she might be abandoned.

The daily supply of provisions was immediately cut to a minimum, and almost at once they felt the effects. The north demands hard work and the greatest resisting power of the vitality; the vitality calls on the body for fuel; and the body in turn insists on food. It is astonishing to see what quantities of nourishment can be absorbed without apparent effect. And when the food is denied, but the vitality is still called upon, it is equally astonishing to see how quickly it takes its revenge. Our travel-

lers became lean in two days, dizzy in a week, tired to the last fibre, on the edge of exhaustion. They took care, however, not to step over that edge.

Sam Bolton saw to it. His was not only the bodily labour, but the mental anxiety. His attitude was the tenseness of a helmsman in a heavy wind, quivering to the faintest indication, ready to give her all she will bear, but equally ready to luff this side of disaster. Only his equable mind could have resisted an almost overpowering impulse toward sporadic bursts of speed or lengthening of hours. He had much of this to repress in Dick. But on the other hand he watched zealously against the needless waste of even a single second. Every expedient his long woods life or his native ingenuity suggested he applied at once to the problem of the greatest speed, the least expenditure of energy to a given end, the smallest consumption of food compatible with the preservation of strength. The legitimate travel of a day might amount to twenty or thirty miles. Sam added an extra five or ten to them. And that five or ten he drew from the living tissues of his very life. They were a creation, made from nothing, given a body by the individual genius of the

man. The drain cut down his nervous energy, made him lean, drew the anxious lines of an incipient exhaustion across his brow.

At first, as may be gathered, the advantages of the game seemed to be strongly in the Indian's favour. The food supply, the transportation facilities, and advantage of position in case game should be encountered were all his. Against him he need count seriously only the offset of dogged Anglo-Saxon grit. But as the travel defined itself, certain compensations made themselves evident.

Direct warfare was impossible to him. He possessed only a single-barrelled muzzle-loading gun of no great efficiency. In case of ambush he might, with luck, be able to kill one of his pursuers, but he would indubitably be captured by the other. He would be unable to approach them at night because of their dogs. His dog-team was stronger, but with it he had to break trail, which the others could utilise without further effort. Even should his position in advance bring him on game, without great luck, he would be unable to kill it, for he was alone and could not leave his team for long. And his very swiftness in itself would react against him, for he

was continually under the temptation daily to exceed by a little his powers.

These considerations the white men at first could not see; and so, logically, they were more encouraged by them when at last they did appear. And then in turn, by natural reaction when the glow had died, the great discouragement of the barren places fell on their spirits. They plodded, seeing no further than their daily necessity of travel. They plodded, their eyes fixed to the trail, which led always on toward the pole star, undeviating, as a deer flies in a straight line hoping to shake off the wolves.

The dense forest growth was succeeded in time by the low spruce and poplar thickets; these in turn by the open reaches planted like a park with the pointed firs. Then came the Land of Little Sticks, and so on out into the vast whiteness of the true North, where the trees are liliputian and the spaces gigantic beyond the measures of the earth; where living things dwindle to the significance of black specks on a limitless field of white, and the aurora crackles and shoots and spreads and threatens like a great inimical and magnificent spirit.

The tendency seemed toward a mighty simplification, as though the complexities of the world were reverting toward their original philosophic unity. The complex summer had become simple autumn; the autumn, winter; now the very winter itself was apparently losing its differentiations of bushes and trees, hills and valleys, streams and living things. The growths were disappearing; the hills were flattening toward the great northern wastes; the rare creatures inhabiting these barrens took on the colour of their environment. The ptarmigan matched the snow,—the fox,—the ermine. They moved either invisible or as ghosts.

Little by little such dwindling of the materials for diverse observation, in alliance with the too-severe labour and the starving, brought about a strange concentration of ideas. The inner world seemed to undergo the same process of simplification as the outer. Extraneous considerations disappeared. The entire cosmos of experience came to be an expanse of white, themselves, and the Trail. These three reacted one on the other, and outside of them there was no reaction.

In the expanse of white was no food: their food

was dwindling; the Trail led on into barren lands where no food was to be had. That was the circle that whirled insistent in their brains.

At night they sank down, felled by the sheer burden of weariness, and no matter how exhausted they might be the Trail continued, springing on with the same apparently tireless energy toward its unknown goal in the North. Gradually they lost sight of the ultimate object of their quest. It became obscured by the immediate object, and that was the following of the Trail. They forgot that a man had made it, or if for a moment it did occur to them that it was the product of some agency outside of and above itself, that agent loomed vaguely as a mysterious, extra-human power, like the winds or the cold or the great Wilderness itself. It did not seem possible that he could feel the need for food, for rest, that ever his vital forces could wane. In the north was starvation for them, a starvation to which they drew ever nearer day by day, but irresistibly the notion obsessed them that this forerunner, the forerunner of the Trail, proved no such material necessities, that he drew his sustenance from his environment in some mysterious manner not to be understood. Al-

ways on and on and on the Trail was destined to lead them until they died, and then the maker of it, —not Jingoss, not the Weasel, the defaulter, the man of flesh and blood and nerves and thoughts and the capacities for suffering,—but a being elusive as the aurora, an embodiment of that dread country, a servant of the unfriendly North, would return as he had done.

Over the land lay silence. The sea has its undertone on the stillest nights; the woods are quiet with an hundred lesser noises; but here was absolute, terrifying, smothering silence,—the suspension of all sound, even the least,—looming like a threatening cloud larger and more dreadful above the cowering imagination. The human soul demanded to shriek aloud in order to preserve its sanity, and yet a whisper uttered over against the heavy portent of this universal stillness seemed a profanation that left the spirit crouched beneath a fear of retribution. And then suddenly the aurora, the only privileged voice, would crackle like a silken banner.

At first the world in the vastness of its spaces seemed to become bigger and bigger. Again abruptly it resumed its normal proportions, but

they, the observers of it, had been struck small. To their own minds they seemed like little black insects crawling painfully. In the distance these insects crawled was a disproportion to the energy expended, a disproportion disheartening, filling the soul with the despair of an accomplishment that could mean anything in the following of that which made the Trail.

Always they ate pemmican. Of this there remained a fairly plentiful supply, but the dog meat was running low. It was essential that the team be well fed. Dick or Sam often travelled the entire day a quarter of a mile one side or the other, hoping thus to encounter game, but without much success. A fox or so, a few ptarmigan, that was all. These they saved for the dogs. Three times a day they boiled tea and devoured the little square of pemmican. It did not supply the bulk their digestive organs needed, and became in time almost nauseatingly unpalatable, but it nourished. That, after all, was the main thing. The privation carved the flesh from their muscles, carved the muscles themselves to leanness.

But in spite of the best they could do, the dog

feed ran out. There remained but one thing to do. Already the sledge was growing lighter and three dogs would be quite adequate for the work. They killed Wolf, the surly and stupid "husky." Every scrap they saved, even to the entrails, which froze at once to solidity. The remaining dogs were put on half rations, just sufficient to keep up their strength. The starvation told on their tempers. Especially did Claire, the sledge-dog, heavy with young, and ravenous to feed their growth, wander about like a spirit, whining mournfully and sniffing the barren breeze.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The journey extended over a month. The last three weeks of it were starvation. At first this meant merely discomfort and the bearing of a certain amount of pain. Later it became acute suffering. Later still it developed into a necessity for proving what virtue resided in the bottom of these men's souls.

Perforce now they must make a choice of what ideas they would keep. Some things must be given up, just as some things had to be discarded when they had lightened the sledge. All the lesser lumber had long since gone. Certain bigger things still remained.

They held grimly to the idea of catching the Indian. Their natural love of life held tenaciously to a hope of return. An equally natural hope clung to the ridiculous idea that the impossible might happen, that the needle should drop from the haystack, that the caribou might spring into their view from

the emptiness of space. Now it seemed that they must make a choice between the first two.

"Dick," said Bolton, solemnly, "we've mighty little pemmican left. If we turn around now, it'll just about get us back to the woods. If we go on farther, we'll have to run into more food, or we'll never get out."

"I knew it," replied Dick.

"Well?"

Dick looked at him astonished. "Well, what?" he inquired.

"Shall we give it up?"

"Give it *up!*" cried the young man. "Of course not; what you thinking of?"

"There's the caribou," suggested Sam, doubtfully; "or maybe Jingoss has more grub than he's going to need. It's a slim chance."

They still further reduced the ration of pemmican. The malnutrition began to play them tricks. It dizzied their brains, swarmed the vastness with hordes of little, dancing black specks like mosquitoes. In the morning every muscle of their bodies was stiffened to the consistency of rawhide, and the movements necessary to loosen the fibres became an

agony hardly to be endured. Nothing of voluntary consciousness remained, could remain, but the effort of lifting the feet, driving the dogs, following the Trail; but involuntary consciousness lent them strange hallucinations. They saw figures moving across the snow, but when they steadied their vision, nothing was there.

They began to stumble over nothing; occasionally to fall. In this was added effort, but more particularly added annoyance. They had continually to watch their footsteps. The walking was no longer involuntary, but they had definitely to think of each movement necessary to the step, and this gave them a further reason for preoccupation, for concentration. Dick's sullenness returned, more terrible than in the summer. He went forward with his head down, refusing to take notice of anything. He walked: that was to him the whole of existence.

Once reverting analogously to his grievance of that time, he mentioned the girl, saying briefly that soon they must all die, and it was better that she die now. Perhaps her share of the pemmican would bring them to their quarry. The idea of return—not abandoned, but persistently ignored—

thrust into prominence this other,—to come to close quarters with the man they pursued, to die grappled with him, dragging him down to the same death by which these three perished. But Sam would have none of it, and Dick easily dropped the subject, relapsing into his grim monomania of pursuit.

In Dick's case even the hope of coming to grapples was fading. He somehow had little faith in his enemy. The man was too intangible, too difficult to gauge. Dick had not caught a glimpse of the Indian since the pursuit began. The young man realised perfectly his own exhaustion; but he had no means of knowing whether or not the Indian was tiring. His faith waned, though his determination did not. Unconsciously he substituted this monomania of pursuit. It took the place of the faith he felt slipping from him—the faith that ever he would see the *fata morgana* luring him out into the Silent Places.

Soon it became necessary to kill another dog. Dick, with a remnant of his old feeling, pleaded for the life of Billy, his pet. Sam would not entertain for a moment the destruction of the hound.

There remained only Claire, the sledge-dog, with her pathetic brown eyes, and her affectionate ways of the female dog. They went to kill her, and discovered her in the act of defending the young to which she had just given birth. Near at hand crouched Mack and Billy, their eyes red with famine, their jaws a-slaver, eager to devour the newborn puppies. And in the grim and dreadful sight Sam Bolton seemed at last to glimpse the face of his terrible antagonist.

They beat back the dogs, and took the puppies. These they killed and dressed. Thus Claire's life was bought for her by the sacrifice of her progeny.

But even that was a temporary respite. She fell in her turn, and was devoured, to the last scrap of her hide. Dick again intervened to save Billy, but failed. Sam issued his orders the more peremptorily as he felt his strength waning, and realised the necessity of economising every ounce of it, even to that required in the arguing of expedients. Dick yielded with slight resistance, as he had yielded in the case of the girl. All matters but the one were rapidly becoming unimportant to him. That con-

centration of his forces which represented the weapon of his greatest utility, was gradually taking place. He was becoming an engine of dogged determination, an engine whose burden the older man had long carried on his shoulders, but which now he was preparing to launch when his own strength should be gone.

At last there was left but the one dog, Mack, the hound, with the wrinkled face and the long, hanging ears. He developed unexpected endurance and an entire willingness, pulling strongly on the sledge, waiting in patience for his scanty meal, searching the faces of his masters with his wise brown eyes, dumbly sympathetic in a trouble whose entirety he could not understand.

The two men took turns in harnessing themselves to the sledge with Mack. The girl followed at the gee-pole.

May-may-gwán showed the endurance of a man. She made no complaint. Always she followed, and followed with her mind alert. Where Dick shut obstinately his faculties within the bare necessity of travel, she and her other companion were continually alive to the possibilities of expedient. This

constituted an additional slight but constant drain on their vital forces.

Starvation gained on them. Perceptibly their strength was waning. Dick wanted to kill the other dog. His argument was plausible. The toboggan was now very light. The men could draw it. They would have the dog-meat to recruit their strength.

Sam shook his head. Dick insisted. He even threatened force. But then the woodsman roused his old-time spirit and fairly beat the young man into submission by the vehemence of his anger. The effort left him exhausted. He sank back into himself, and refused, in the apathy of weariness, to give any explanation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

By now it was the first week in March. The weather began to assume a new aspect. During the winter months it had not snowed, for the moisture had all been squeezed from the air, leaving it crisp, brilliant, sparkling. Now the sun, long hesitant, at last began to swing up the sky. Far south the warmer airs of spring were awakening the Kansas fields. Here in the barren country the steel sky melted to a haze. During the day, when the sun was up, the surface of the snow even softened a little, and a very perceptible warmth allowed them to rest, their parkas thrown back, without discomfort.

The men noticed this, and knew it as the precursor of the spring snow-fall. Dick grew desperately uneasy, desperately anxious to push on, to catch up before the complete obliteration of the trail, when his resources would perforce run out for lack of an object to which to apply them. He knew perfectly well that this must be what the Indian had

anticipated, the reason why he had dared to go out into the barren grounds, and to his present helpless lack of a further expedient the defaulter's confidence in the natural sequence seemed only too well justified. Sam remained inscrutable.

The expected happened late one afternoon. All day the haze had thickened, until at last, without definite transition, it had become a cloud covering the entire sky. Then it had snowed. The great, clogging flakes sifted down gently, ziz-zagging through the air like so many pieces of paper. They impacted softly against the world, standing away from each other and from the surface on which they alighted by the full stretch of their crystal arms. In an hour three inches had fallen. The hollows and depressions were filling to the level; the Trail was growing indistinct.

Dick watched from the shelter of a growing despair. Never had he felt so helpless. This thing was so simple, yet so effective; and nothing he could do would nullify its results. As sometimes in a crisis a man will give his whole attention to a trivial thing, so Dick fastened his gaze on a single snowshoe track on the edge of a covered bowlder. By it

he gauged the progress of the storm. When at last even his imagination could not differentiate it from the surface on either side, he looked up. The visible world was white and smooth and level. No faintest trace of the Trail remained. East, west, north, south, lay uniformity. The Indian had disappeared utterly from the face of the earth.

The storm lightened and faint streaks of light shot through the clouds.

"Well, let's be moving," said Sam.

"Moving where?" demanded Dick, bitterly.

But the old man led forward the hound.

"Remember the lake where we lost the track of that Chippewa?" he inquired. "Well, a foot of light snow is nothing. Mush on, Mack!"

The hound sniffed deep, filling his nostrils with the feather snow, which promptly he sneezed out. Then he swung off easily on his little dog-trot, never at fault, never hesitant, picking up the turns and twistings of the Indian's newer purpose as surely as a mind-reader the concealed pin.

For Jingoss had been awaiting eagerly this fall of snow, as this immediate change of direction showed. He was sure that now they could no longer

follow him. It was for this he had lured them farther and farther into the wilderness, waiting for the great enemy of them all to cover his track, to throw across his vanishing figure her ultimate denial of their purposes. At once, convinced of his safety, he turned to the west and southwest.

At just what moment he discovered that he was still followed it was impossible to determine. But very shortly a certain indecision could be read in the signs of his journeying. He turned to the south, changed his mind, doubled on his tracks like a rabbit, finally, his purpose decided, he shot away on the direct line again for the frozen reaches of desolation in the north.

The moment's flicker of encouragement lighted by the success of the dog, fell again to blackness as the three faced further incursion into the land of starvation. They had allowed themselves for a moment to believe that the Indian might now have reached the limit of his intention; that now he might turn toward a chance at least of life. But this showed that his purpose, or obstinacy or madness remained unchanged, and this newer proof indicated that it possessed a depth of de-

termination that might lead to any extreme. They had to readjust themselves to the idea. Perforce they had to extend their faith, had to believe in the caribou herds. From every little rise they looked abroad, insisting on a childish confidence in the existence of game. They could not afford to take the reasonable view, could not afford to estimate the chances against their encountering in all that vastness of space the single pin-point where grazed abundance.

From time to time, thereafter, the snow fell. On the mere fact of their persistence it had litle effect; but it clogged their snow-shoes, it wore them down. A twig tripped them; and the efforts of all three were needed to aid one to rise. A dozen steps were all they could accomplish without rest; a dozen short, stumbling steps that were, nevertheless, so many mile-posts in the progress to their final exhaustion. When one fell, he lay huddled, unable at once to rally his vital forces to attempt the exertion of regaining his feet. The day's journey was pitifully short, pitifully inadequate to the imperious demands of that onward-leading Trail, and yet each day's journey lessened the always desper-

ate chance of a return to the game country. In spite of that, it never again crossed their minds that it might be well to abandon the task. They might die, but it would be on the Trail, and the death clutch of their fingers would still be extended toward the north, where dwelt their enemy, and into whose protective arms their quarry had fled.

As his strength ebbed Dick Herron's energies concentrated more and more to his monomania of pursuit. The round, full curves of his body had shrunken to angles, the fresh tints of his skin had turned to leather, the flesh of his cheeks had sunken, his teeth showed in the drawing back of his lips. All these signs spoke of exhaustion and of ultimate collapse. But as the case grew more desperate, he seemed to discover in some unsuspected quality of his spirit, or perhaps merely of his youth, a fitful and wonderful power. He collapsed from weakness, to be sure; but in a moment his iron will, apparently angered to incandescence, got him to his feet and on his way with an excess of energy. He helped the others. He urged the dog. And then slowly the fictitious vigour ran out. The light, the red, terrible glare of madness, faded from his eye;

it became glazed and lifeless; his shoulders dropped; his head hung; he fell.

Gradually in the transition period between the darkness of winter and the coming of spring the world took on an unearthly aspect. It became an inferno of light without corresponding warmth, of blinding, flaring, intolerable light reflected from the snow. It became luminous, as though the ghosts of the ancient days of incandescence had revisited the calendar. It was raw, new, huge, uncouth, embryonic, adapted to the production of tremendous monsters, unfit for the habitation of tiny men with delicate physical and mental adjustments. Only to the mind of a Caliban could it be other than terrifying. Things grew to a size out of all reason. The horizon was infinitely remote, lost in snow-mists, fearful with the large-blown mirages of little things. Strange and indeterminate somethings menaced on all sides, menaced in greater and greater threat, until with actual proximity they mysteriously disappeared, leaving behind them as a blind to conceal their real identity such small matters as a stunted shrub, an exposed rock, the shadow of a wind-rift on the snow. And low in the sky danced

in unholy revel the suns, sometimes as many as eight of them, gazing with the abandoned red eyes of debauchees on the insignificant travellers groping feebly amid phantasmagoria.

The great light, the dazzle, the glitter, the incessant movement of the mirages, the shining of the mock suns, all these created an impression of heat, of light, of the pleasantness of a warmed land. Yet still persisted, only modified by the sun, the cold of the northern winter. And this denial of appearance sufficed to render unreal all the round globe, so that at any moment the eye anticipated its crumbling like a dust apple, with its cold, its vastness, its emptiness, its hunger, its indecently many suns, leaving the human soul in the abyss of space. The North threw over them the power of her spell, so that to them the step from life to death seemed a short, an easy, a natural one to take.

Nevertheless their souls made struggle, as did their bodies. They fought down the feeling of illusion just as they had fought down the feelings of hunger, of weariness, and of cold. Sam fashioned rough wooden spectacles with tiny transverse slits through which to look, and these they assumed

against the snow-blindness. They kept a sharp watch for freezing. Already their faces were blackened and parched by the frost, and cracked through the thick skin down to the raw. Sam had frozen his great toe, and had with his knife cut to the bone in order to prevent mortification. They tried to talk a little in order to combat by unison of spirit the dreadful influence the North was bringing to bear. They gained ten feet as a saint of the early church gained his soul for paradise.

Now it came to the point where they could no longer afford to eat their pemmican. They boiled it, along with strips of the rawhide dog-harness, and drank the soup. It sufficed not at all to appease the pain of their hunger, nor appreciably did it give them strength, but somehow it fed the vital spark. They endured fearful cramps. So far had their faculties lost vigour that only by a distinct effort of the will could they focus their eyes to the examination of any object.

Their obsessions of mind were now two. They followed the Trail; they looked for the caribou herds. After a time the improbability became tenuous. They actually expected the impossible, felt

defrauded at not obtaining it, cried out weakly against their ill fortune in not encountering the herd that was probably two thousand miles away. In its withholding the North seemed to play unfairly. She denied them the chances of the game.

And the Trail! Not the freezing nor the starvation nor the illusion were so potent in the deeper discouragement of the spirit as that. Always it led on. They could see it; they could see its direction; that was all. Tireless it ran on and on and on. For all they knew the Indian, hearty and confident in his wilderness strength, might be watching them at every moment, laughing at the feeble thirty feet their pain bought them, gliding on swiftly in an hour farther than they could travel in a day. This possibility persisted until, in their minds, it became the fact. They endowed their enemy with all they themselves lacked; with strength, with swiftness, with the sustenance of life. Yet never for a moment did it occur to them to abandon the pursuit.

Sam was growing uncertain in his movements; Dick was plainly going mad. The girl followed; that was all one could say, for whatever suffering

she proved was hidden beneath race stolidity, and more nobly beneath a great devotion.

And then late one afternoon they came to a bloody spot on the snow. Here Jingoss had killed. Here he had found what had been denied them, what they needed so sorely. The North was on his side. He now had meat in plenty, and meat meant strength, and strength meant swiftness, and swiftness meant the safety of this world for him and the certainty of the next for them. The tenuous hope that had persisted through all the psychological pressure the North had brought to bear, the hope that they had not even acknowledged to themselves, the hope based merely on the circumstance that they did not *know*, was routed by this one fact. Now they could no longer shelter behind the flimsy screen of an ignorance of their enemy's condition. They knew. The most profound discouragement descended on them.

But even yet they did not yield to the great antagonist. The strength of meat lacked them: the strength of despair remained. A rapid dash might bring them to grapples. And somewhere in the depths of their indomitable spirits, somewhere in

the line of their hardy, Anglo-Saxon descent, they knew they would find the necessary vitality.

Stars glittered like sparks on polished steel. On the northwest wind swooped the chill of the winter's end, and in that chill was the breath of the North. Sam Bolton, crushed by the weight of a great exhaustion, recognised the familiar menace, and raised his head, gazing long from glazed eyes out into the Silent Places.

"Not yet!" he said aloud.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

But the next morning he was unable to rise. The last drop of his vitality had run out. At length the connection between his will and his body had been severed, so that the latter was no longer under his command. After the first moment he knew well enough what this meant, knew that here he must die, here he must lie crushed finally under the sheer weight of his antagonist. It was as though she, the great North, had heard his defiant words the night before, and thus proved to him their emptiness.

And yet the last reserves of the old man's purpose were not yet destroyed. Here he must remain, it is true, but still he possessed next his hand the human weapon he had carried so far and so painfully by the exercise of his ingenuity and the genius of his long experience. He had staggered under its burden as far as he could; now was the moment for launching it. He called the young man to him.

"I cannot go on," said he, in gasps. "Leave the sledge. Take the dog. Do not lose him. Travel fast. You must get him by to-morrow night. Sleep some to-night. Travel fast."

Dick nodded. He understood. Already the scarlet hate, the dogged mad glare of a set purpose was glazing his vision. It was the sprint at the end of the race. He need no longer save himself.

He took a single blanket and the little shreds of dog meat that remained. Some of the pemmican, a mere scrap, he left with Sam. Mack he held in leash.

"I will live five days," went on Sam, "perhaps six. I will try to live. If you should come back in that time,—with meat—the caribou—you understand." His voice trailed away, unwilling to mock the face of probability with such a chance.

Dick nodded again. He had nothing to say. He wrung the old man's hand and turned away.

Mack thrust his nose forward. They started.

Sam, left alone, rolled himself again in his thick coverings under the snow, which would protect him from the night cold. There he would lie absolutely motionless, hoarding the drops of his life. From

time to time, at long intervals, he would taste the pemmican. And characteristically enough, his regret, his sorrow, was, not that he must be left to perish, not even that he must acknowledge himself beaten, but that he was deprived of the chance for this last desperate dash before death stooped.

When Dick stepped out on the trail, May-may-gwán followed. After a moment he took cognisance of the crunch of her snow-shoes behind him. He turned and curtly ordered her back. She persisted. Again he turned, his face nervous with all the strength he had summoned for the final effort, shouting at her hoarsely, laying on her the anger of his command. She seemed not to hear him. He raised his fist and beat her, hitting her again and again, finally reaching her face. She went down silently, without even a moan. But when he stared back again, after the next dozen steps, she had risen and was still tottering on along the Trail.

He threw his hands up with a gesture of abandonment. Then without a word, grim and terrible, he put his head down and started.

He never looked back. Madness held him. Finesse, saving, the crafty utilising of small advan-

tages had had their day. It was the moment for brute strength. All day he swung on in a swirl of snow, tireless. The landscape swam about him, the white glare searched out the inmost painful recesses of his brain. He knew enough to keep his eyes shut most of the time, trusting to Mack. At noon he divided accurately the entire food supply with the animal. At night he fasted. The two, man and dog, slept huddled close together for the sake of the warmth. At midnight the girl crept in broken and exhausted.

The next day Dick was as wonderful. A man strong in meat could not have travelled so. The light snow whirled behind him in a cloud. The wind of his going strained the capote from his emaciated face. So, in the nature of the man, he would go until the end. Then he would give out all at once, would fall from full life to complete dissolution of forces. Behind him, pitifully remote, pitifully bent, struggling futilely, obsessed by a mania as strong as that of these madmen who persisted even beyond the end of all things, was the figure of the girl. She could not stand upright, she could not breathe, yet she, too, followed the Trail, that dread

symbol of so many hopes and ideals and despairs. Dick did not notice her, did not remember her existence, any more than he remembered the existence of Sam Bolton, of trees, of streams, of summer and warm winds, of the world, of the devil, of God, of himself.

All about him the landscape swayed like mist; the suns danced indecent revel; specks and blotches, the beginning of snow-blindness, swam grotesquely projected into a world less real than they. Living things moved everywhere. Ordinarily the man paid no attention to them, knowing them for what they were, but once, warned by some deep and subtle instinct, he made the effort to clear his vision and saw a fox. By another miracle he killed it. The carcass he divided with his dog. He gave none of it to the girl.

By evening of the second day he had not yet overtaken his quarry. But the trail was evidently fresher, and the fox's meat gave him another chance. He slept, as before, with Mack the hound; and, as before, May-may-gwán crept in hours later to fall exhausted.

And over the three figures, lying as dead, the

North whirred in the wind, waiting to stoop, triumphing, glorying that she had brought the boasts of men to nothing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The next morning was the third day. There was no delay in getting started. All Dick had to do was to roll his blanket. He whirled on, still with his impetuous, fictitious vigour unimpaired. The girl staggered after him ten feet, then pitched forward. He turned uncertainly. She reached out to touch him. Her eyes said a farewell. It was the end.

Dick stood a moment, his eyes vague. Then mechanically he put his head down, mechanically he looked for the Trail, mechanically he shot away alone, alone except for the faithful, gaunt hound, the only thing that remained to him out of a whole world of living beings.

To his fevered vision the Trail was becoming fresher. Every step he took gave him the impression of so much gained, as though the man he was in pursuit of was standing still waiting to be taken. For the first time in months the conviction of absolute success took possession of him. His sight

cleared, his heart beat strong, his whole being quivered with vigour. The illusion of the North faded away like a mist. The world was a flat plain of snow, with here and there a stunted spruce, knee-high, protruding above it, and with here and there an inequality of hidden bowlders and rounded knolls. Far off was the horizon, partially hidden in the normal snow-fog of this time of year. All objects were stationary, solid, permanent. Even the mock suns were only what was to be expected in so high a latitude. Dick was conscious of arguing these things to himself with extraordinary accuracy of logic. He proved a glow of happiness in the clarity of his brain, in the ease of his body, in the certainty of his success. The candle flared clear before its expiration.

For some moments he enjoyed this feeling of well-being, then a disturbing element insinuated itself. At first it was merely an uneasiness, which he could not place, a vague and nebulous irritation, a single crumpled rose-leaf. Then it grew to the proportions of a menace which banked his horizon with thunder, though the sun still shone overhead. Finally it became a terror, clutching him at the

throat. He seemed to feel the need of identifying it. By an effort he recognised it as a lack. Something was missing without which there was for him no success, no happiness, no well-being, no strength, no existence. That something he must find. In the search his soul descended again to the region of dread, the regions of phantasmagoria. The earth heaved and rocked and swam in a sea of cold and glaring light. Strange creatures, momentarily changing shape and size, glided monstrous across the middle distance. The mock suns danced in the heavens.

Twice he stopped short and listened. In his brain the lack was defining itself as the lack of a sound. It was something he had always been used to. Now it had been taken away. The world was silent in its deprivation, and the silence stifled him. It had been something so usual that he had never noticed it; its absence called it to his attention for the first time. So far in the circle his mind ran; then swung back. He beat his forehead. Great as were the sufferings of his body, they were as nothing compared with these unreal torturings of his maddened brain.

For the third time he stopped, his head sidewise in the attitude of listening. At once easily, without effort, he knew. All these months behind him had sounded the *crunch* of snow-shoes. All these months about him, wrapping him so softly that he had never been conscious of it, had been the worship of a great devotion. Now they were taken away, he missed them. His spirit, great to withstand the hardships of the body, strong to deny itself, so that even at the last he had resisted the temptation of hunger and divided with his dog, in its weakened condition could not stand the exposure to the loneliness, to the barren winds of a peopleless world.

A long minute he stood, listening, demanding against all reason to hear the *crunch, crunch, crunch* that should tell him he was not alone. Then, without a glance at the Trail he had followed so long, he turned back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The girl was lying face down as he had left her. Already the windrow of the snow was beginning to form, like the curve of a wave about to break over her prostrate body. He sat down beside her, and gathered her into his arms, throwing the thick three-point blanket with its warm lining over the bent forms of both. At once it was as though he had always been there, his back to the unceasing winds, a permanence in the wilderness. The struggles of the long, long trail withdrew swiftly into the past—they had never been. And through the unreality of this feeling shot a single illuminating shaft of truth: never would he find in himself the power to take the trail again. The bubbling fever-height of his energies suddenly drained away.

Mack, the hound, lay patiently at his feet. He, too, suffered, and he did not understand, but that did not matter; his faithfulness could not doubt. For a single instant it occurred to the young man

that he might kill the dog, and so procure nourishment with which to extricate himself and the girl; but the thought drifted idly through his mind, and so on and away. It did not matter. He could never again follow that Trail, and a few days more or less——

The girl sighed and opened her eyes. They widened.

"Jibiwánisi!" she whispered.

Her eyes remained fixed on his face, puzzling out the mere facts. Then all at once they softened.

"You came back," she murmured.

Dick did not reply. He drew her a little closer into his arms.

For a long time they said nothing. Then the girl:

"It has come, Jibiwánisi, we must die," and after a moment, "You came back."

She closed her eyes again, happily.

"Why did you come back?" she asked after a while.

"I do not know," said Dick.

The snow sifted here and there like beach sand. Occasionally the dog shook himself free of it, but

over the two human beings it flung, little by little, the whiteness of its uniformity, a warm mantle against the freezing. They became an integral part of the landscape, permanent as it, coeval with its rocks and hills, ancient as the world, a symbol of obscure passions and instincts and spiritual beauties old as the human race.

Abruptly Dick spoke, his voice harsh.

"We die here, Little Sister. I do not regret. I have done the best in me. It is well for me to die. But this is not your affair. It was not for you to give your life. Had you not followed you would now be warm in the wigwams of your people. This is heavy on my heart."

"Was it for this you came back to me?" she inquired.

Dick considered. "No," he replied.

"The south wind blows warm on me," she said, after a moment.

The man thought her mind wandered with the starvation, but this was not the case. Her speech had made one of those strange lapses into rhetoric so common to the savage peoples.

"Jibiwánisi," she went on solemnly, "to me now

this is a land where the trees are green and the waters flow and the sun shines and the fat deer are in the grasses. My heart sings like the birds. What should I care for dying? It is well to die when one is happy."

"Are you happy, May-may-gwán?" asked Dick.

For answer she raised her eyes to his. Freed of the distraction of another purpose, clarified by the near approach of death, his spirit looked, and for the first time understood.

"May-may-gwán, I did not know," said he, awed.

He meant that he had not before perceived her love for him. She thought he had not before realised his love for her. Her own affection seemed to her as self-evident as the fact that her eyes were black.

"Yes, yes," she hastened to comfort what she supposed must be his distress, "I know. But you turned back."

She closed her eyes again and appeared to doze in a happy dream. The North swooped above them like some greedy bird of prey.

Gradually in his isolation and stillness Dick began to feel this. It grew on him little by little. Within a few hours, by grace of suffering and of imminent death, he came into his woodsman's heritage of imagination. Men like Sam Bolton gained it by patient service, by living, by the slow accumulations of years, but in essence it remained the same. Where before the young man had seen only the naked, material facts, now he felt the spiritual presence, the calm, ruthless, just, terrible Enemy, seeking no combat, avoiding none, conquering with a lofty air of predestination, inevitable, mighty. His eyes were opened, like the prophet's of old. The North hovered over him almost palpable. In the strange borderland of mingled illusion and reality where now he and starvation dwelt he thought sometimes to hear voices, the voices of his enemy's triumph.

"Is it done?" they asked him, insistently. "Is it over? Are you beaten? Is your stubborn spirit at last bowed down, humiliated, crushed? Do you relinquish the prize,—and the struggle? Is it done?"

The girl stirred slightly in his arms. He fo-

cussed his eyes. Already the day had passed, and the first streamers of the aurora were crackling in the sky. They reduced this day, this year, this generation of men to a pin-point in time. The tragedy enacting itself on the snow amounted to nothing. It would soon be over: it occupied but one of many, many nights—wherein the aurora would crackle and shoot forth and ebb back in precisely the same deathful, living way, as though the death of it were the death in this world, but the life of it were a thing celestial and alien. The moment, to these three who perished the most important of all the infinite millions of millions that constitute time, was absolutely without special meaning to the wonderful, flaming, unearthly lights of the North.

Mack, the hound, lay in the position he had first assumed, his nose between his outstretched forepaws. So he had lain all that day and that night. So it seemed he must intend to lie until death took him. For on this dreadful journey Mack had risen above the restrictions imposed by his status as a zoological species, had ceased to be merely a dog, and by virtue of steadfastness, of loyalty, of un-

complaining suffering, had entered into the higher estate of a living being that has fearlessly done his best in the world before his call to leave it.

The girl opened her eyes.

"Jibiwánisi," she said, faintly, "the end is come."

Agonized, Dick forced himself to consciousness of the landscape. It contained moving figures in plenty. One after the other he brought them within the focus of scrutiny and dissolved them into thin air. If only the caribou herds——

He looked down again to meet her eyes.

"Do not grieve. I am happy, Jibiwánisi," she whispered.

After a little, "I will die first," and then, "This land and that—there must be a border. I will be waiting there. I will wait always. I will not go into the land until you come. I will wait to see it—with you. Oh, Jibiwánisi," she cried suddenly, with a strength and passion in startling contrast to her weakness. "I am yours, yours, yours! You are mine." She half raised herself and seized his two arms, searching his eyes with terror, trying to reassure herself, to drive off the doubts that sud-

denly had thronged upon her. "Tell me," she shook him by the arm.

"I am yours," Dick lied, steadily; "my heart is yours, I love you."

He bent and kissed her on the lips. She quivered and closed her eyes with a deep sigh.

Ten minutes later she died.

CHAPTER THIRTY

This was near the dawn of the fourth day. Dick remained always in the same attitude, holding the dead girl in his arms. Mack, the hound, lay as always, loyal, patient to the last. After the girl's departure the wind fell and a great stillness seemed to have descended on the world.

The young man had lost the significance of his position, had forgotten the snow and cold and lack of food, had forgotten even the fact of death which he was hugging to his breast. His powers, burning clear in the spirit, were concentrated on the changes taking place within himself. By these things the world of manhood was opened to him; he was no longer a boy. To most it comes as a slow growth. With him it was revelation. The completeness of it shook him to the foundations of life. He took no account of the certainty of his own destruction. It seemed to him, in the thronging of new impressions, that he might sit there forever, a buddha of con-

templation, looking on the world as his maturity had readjusted it.

Never now could he travel the Silent Places as he had heretofore, stupidly, blindly, obstinately, unthinkingly, worse than an animal in perception. The wilderness he could front intelligently, for he had seen her face. Never now could he conduct himself so selfishly, so brutally, so without consideration, as though he were the central point of the system, as though there existed no other preferences, convictions, conditions of being that might require the readjustment of his own. He saw these others for the first time. Never now could he live with his fellow beings in such blindness of their motives and the passions of their hearts. His own heart, like a lute, was strung to the pitch of humanity. Never now could he be guilty of such harm as he had unthinkingly accomplished on the girl. His eyes were opened to human suffering. The life of the world beat through his. The compassion of the greater humanity came to him softly, as a gift from the portals of death. The full savour of it he knew at last, knew that finally he had rounded out the circle of his domain.

This was what life required of his last consciousness. Having attained to it, the greater forces had no more concern with him. They left him, a poor, weak, naked human soul exposed to the terrors of the North. For the first time he saw them in all their dreadfulness. They clutched him with the fingers of cruel suffering so that his body was wracked with the tortures of dissolution. They flung before his eyes the obscene, unholy shapes of illusion. They filled his ears with voices. He was afraid. He cowered down, covering his eyes with his forearms, and trembled, and sobbed, and uttered little moans. He was alone in the world, alone with enemies who had him in their power and would destroy him. He feared to look up. The man's spirit was broken. All the accumulated terrors which his resolute spirit had thrust from him in the long months of struggle, rushed in on him now that his guard was down. They rioted in the empty chambers of his soul.

"Is it done?" they shrieked in triumph. "Is it over? Are you beaten? Is your spirit crushed? Is the victory ours? Is it done?"

Dick shivered and shrank as from a blow.

"Is it done?" the voices insisted. "Is it over? Are you beaten? Is it done?"

The man shrieked aloud in agony.

"Oh, my God!" he cried. "Oh, yes, yes, yes! I am beaten. I can do nothing. Kill me. It is done."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

As though these words were a signal, Mack, the hound, who had up to now rested as motionless as though frozen to his place, raised himself on his haunches and gazed earnestly to the north.

In the distance Dick seemed to make out an object moving. As he had so often done before, by an effort he brought his eyes to focus, expecting, as also had happened so often before, that the object would disappear. But it persisted, black against the snow. Its outlines could not be guessed; its distance could not be estimated, its direction of travel could not be determined. Only the bare fact of its existence was sure. Somewhere out in the waste it, moving, antithesised these other three black masses on the whiteness, the living man, the living animal, the dead girl.

Dick variously identified it. At one moment he thought it a marten near at hand; then it became a caribou far away; then a fox between the two.

Finally, instantaneously, as though at a bound it had leaped from indeterminate mists to the commonplace glare of every day, he saw it was a man.

The man was moving painfully, lifting each foot with an appearance of great effort, stumbling, staggering sideways from time to time as though in extreme weakness. Once he fell. Then he recovered the upright as though necklaced with great weights. His hands were empty of weapons. In the uncertainty of his movements he gradually approached.

Now Dick could see the great emaciation of his features. The bones of his cheeks seemed to press through his skin, which was leathery and scabbed and cracked to the raw from much frosting. His lips drew tight across his teeth, which grinned in the face of exhaustion like the travesty of laughter on a skull. His eyes were lost in the caverns of their sockets. His thin nostrils were wide, and through them and through the parted lips the breath came and went in strong, rasping gasps, audible even at this distance of two hundred paces. One live thing this wreck of a man expressed. His forces were near their end, but such of them as re-

mained were concentrated in a determination to go on. He moved painfully, but he moved; he staggered, but he always recovered; he fell, and it was a terrible labour to rise, but always he rose and went on.

Dick Herron, sitting there with the dead girl across his knees, watched the man with a strange, detached curiosity. His mind had slipped back into its hazes. The world of phantasms had resumed its sway. He was seeing in this struggling figure a vision of himself as he had been, the self he had transcended now, and would never again resume. Just so he had battled, bringing to the occasion every last resource of the human spirit, tearing from the deeps of his nature the roots where life germinated and throwing them recklessly before the footsteps of his endeavour, emptying himself, wringing himself to a dry, fibrous husk of a man that his Way might be completed. His lips parted with a sigh of relief that this was all over. He was as an old man whose life, for good or ill, success or failure, is done, and who looks from the serenity of age on those who have still their youth to spend, their years to dole out day by day, painfully, in

the intense anxiety of the moral purpose, as the price of life. In a spell of mysticism he sat there waiting.

The man plodded on, led by some compelling fate, to the one spot in the white immensity where were living creatures. When he had approached to within fifty paces, Dick could see his eyes. They were tight closed. As the young man watched, the other opened them, but instantly blinked them shut again as though he had encountered the searing of a white-hot iron. Dick Herron understood. The man had gone snow-blind.

And then, singularly enough for the first time, it was borne in on him who this man was, what was the significance of his return. Jingoss, the renegade Ojibway, the defaulter, the maker of the dread, mysterious Trail that had led them so far into this grim land, Jingoss was blind, and, imagining himself still going north, still treading mechanically the hopeless way of his escape, had become bewildered and turned south.

Dick waited, mysteriously held to inaction, watching the useless efforts of this other from the vantage ground of a wonderful fatalism,—as the

North had watched him. The Indian plodded doggedly on, on, on. He entered the circle of the little camp. Dick raised his rifle and pressed its muzzle against the man's chest.

"Stop!" he commanded, his voice croaking harsh across the stillness.

The Indian, with a sob of mingled emotion, in which, strangely enough, relief seemed the predominant note, collapsed to the ground. The North, insistent on the victory but indifferent to the stake, tossed carelessly the prize at issue into the hands of her beaten antagonist.

And then, dim and ghostly, rank after rank, across the middle distance drifted the caribou herds.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

It was beyond the middle of summer. The day had been hot, but now the velvet night was descending. The canoe had turned into the channel at the head of the island on which was situated Conjuror's House. The end of the journey was at hand.

Dick paddled in the bow. His face had regained its freshness, but not entirely its former boyish roundness. The old air of bravado again sat his spirit—a man's nature persists to the end, and immortal and unquenchable youth is a gift of the gods—but in the depths of his strange, narrow eyes was a new steadiness, a new responsibility, the well-known, quiet, competent look invariably a characteristic of true woodsmen. At his feet lay the dog, one red-rimmed eye cocked up at the man who had gone down to the depths in his company.

The Indian Jingoss sat amidships, his hands bound strongly with buckskin thongs, a man of medium size, broad face, beady eyes with surface

lights. He had cost much: he was to be given no chance to escape. Always his hands remained bound with the buckskin thongs, except at times when Dick or Sam stood over him with a rifle. At night his wrists were further attached to one of Sam's. Mack, too, understood the situation, and guarded as jealously as did his masters.

Sam wielded the steersman's paddle. His appearance was absolutely unaffected by this one episode in a long life.

They rounded the point into the main sweep of the east river, stole down along the bank in the gathering twilight, and softly beached their canoe below the white buildings of the Factory. With a muttered word of command to their captive, they disembarked and climbed the steepness of the low bluff to the grass-plot above. The dog followed at their heels.

Suddenly the impression of this year, until now so vividly a part of the present, was stricken into the past, the past of memory. Up to the very instant of topping the bluff it had been life; now it was experience.

For the Post was absolutely unchanged from that

other summer evening of over a year ago when they had started out into the Silent Places. The familiarity of this fact, hitherto, for some strange reason, absolutely unexpected, reassured them their places in the normal world of living beings. The dead vision of the North had left in their spirits a residuum of its mysticism. Their experience of her power had induced in them a condition of mind when it would not have surprised them to discover the world shaken to its foundations, as their souls had been shaken. But here were familiar, peaceful things, unchanged, indifferent even to the passing of time. Involuntarily they drew a deep breath of relief, and, without knowing it, re-entered a sanity which had not been entirely theirs since the snows of the autumn before.

Over by the guns, indistinct in the falling twilight, the accustomed group of *voyageurs* and post-keepers were chatting, smoking, humming songs in the accustomed way. The low velvet band of forest against the sky; the dim squares of the log-houses punctuated with their dots of lamplight; the masses of the Storehouse, the stockade, the Factory; the long flag-staff like a mast against the stars; the con-

stant impression of human life and activity,—these anodynes of accustomedness steadied these men's faith to the supremacy of human institutions.

On the Factory veranda could be dimly made out the figures of a dozen men. They sat silent. Occasionally a cigar glowed brighter for a moment, then dulled. Across a single square of subdued light the smoke eddied.

The three travellers approached, Sam Bolton in the lead, peering through the dusk in search of his chief. In a moment he made him out, sitting, as always, square to the world, his head sunk forward, his eyes gleaming from beneath the white tufts of his eyebrows. At once the woodsmen mounted the steps.

No one stirred or spoke. Only the smokers suspended their cigars in mid-air a few inches from their faces in the most perfect attitude of attention.

"Galen Albret," announced the old woodsman, "here is the Ojibway, Jingoss."

The Factor stirred slightly; his bulk, the significance of his features lost in obscurity.

"Me-en-gen!" he called, sharply.

The tall, straight figure of his Indian familiar glided from the dusk of the veranda's end.

"To-morrow at smoke time," commanded the Factor, using the Ojibway tongue, "let this man be whipped before the people, fifty lashes. Then let him be chained to the Tree for the space of one week, and let it be written above him in Ojibway and in Cree that thus Galen Albret punishes those who steal."

Without a word Me-en-gan took the defaulter by the arm and conducted him away.

Galen Albret had fallen into a profound silence, which no one ventured to break. Dick and Sam, uncertain as to whether or not they, too, were dismissed, shifted uneasily.

"How did you find him?" demanded the Factor, abruptly.

"We went with old Haukemah's band down as far as the Mattawishguia. There we left them and went up stream and over the divide. Dick here broke his leg and was laid up for near three months. I looked all that district over while he was getting well. Then we made winter travel down through the Kabinikágam country and looked her over. We

got track of this Jingoss over near the hills, but he got wind of us and skipped when we was almost on top of him. We took his trail. He went straight north, trying to shake us off, and we got up into the barren country. We'd have lost him in the snow if it hadn't been for that dog there. He could trail him through new snow. We run out of grub up there, and finally I gave out. Dick here pushed on alone and found the Injun wandering around snow-blind. He run onto some caribou about that time, too, and killed some. Then he came back and got me:—I had a little pemmican and boiled my moccasins. We had lots of meat, so we rested up a couple of weeks, and then came back."

That was all. These men had done a great thing, and thus simply they told it. And they only told that much of it because it was their duty; they must report to their chief.

Galen Albret seemed for a moment to consider, as was his habit.

"You have done well," he pronounced at last. "My confidence in you was justified. The pay stands as agreed. In addition I place you in charge

of the post at Lost River, and you, Herron, in charge of the Mattágami Brigade."

The men flushed, deeply pleased, more than rewarded, not by the money nor the advancement, but by the unqualified satisfaction of their commander.

They turned away. At this moment Virginia Albret, on some errand to her father, appeared outlined in slender youth against the doorway. On the instant she recognized them.

"Why, Sam and Dick," she said, "I am glad to see you. When did you get back?"

"Just back, Miss Virginia," replied Sam.

"That's good. I hope you've had a successful trip."

"Yes," answered Sam. The woodsman stood there a little awkwardly, wishing to be polite, not sure as to whether they should now go without further dismissal.

"See, Miss Virginia," hesitated Sam, to fill in the pause, "I have your handkerchief yet."

"I'm glad you kept it, Sam," replied the young girl; "and have you yours, Dick?"

And suddenly to Dick the contrast between this reality and that other came home with the vividness

of a picture. He saw again the snow-swept plain, the wavering shapes of illusion, the mock suns dancing in unholy revel. The colour of the North burned before his eyes; a madness of the North unsealed his lips.

"I used it to cover a dead girl's face," he replied, bluntly.

The story had been as gray as a report of statistics,—so many places visited, so much time consumed. The men smoking cigars, lounging on cushioned seats in the tepid summer air, had listened to it unimpressed, as one listens to the reading of minutes of a gathering long past. This simple sentenced breathed into it life. The magnitude of the undertaking sprang up across the horizon of their comprehension. They saw between the mile-post markings of Sam Bolton's dry statements of fact, glimpses of vague, mysterious, and terrible deeds, indistinct, wonderful. The two before them loomed big in the symbolism of the wide world of men's endurance and determination and courage.

The darkness swallowed them before the group on the veranda had caught its breath. In a moment the voices about the cannon raised in greeting.

A swift play of question and answer shot back and forth. "Out all the year?" "Where? Kabinikágam? Oh, yes, east of Brunswick Lake." "Good trip?" "That's right." "Glad of it." Then the clamour rose, many beseeching, one refusing. The year was done. These men had done a mighty deed, and yet a few careless answers were all they had to tell of it. The group, satisfied, were begging another song. And so, in a moment, just as a year before, Dick's rich, husky baritone raised in the words of the old melody. The circle was closed.

"There was an old darky, and his name was Uncle Ned,
And he lived long ago, long ago——"

The night hushed to silence. Even the wolves were still, and the *giddés* down at the Indian camp ceased their endless quarrelling. Dick's voice had all the world to itself. The men on the Factory veranda smoked, the disks of their cigars dulling and glowing. Galen Albret, inscrutable, grim, brooded his unguessable thoughts. Virginia, in the doorway, rested her head pensively against one arm outstretched against the lintel.

"For there's no more work for poor old Ned,
He's gone where the good darkies go."

The song finished. There succeeded the great compliment of quiet.

To Virginia it was given to speak the concluding word of this episode. She sighed, stretching out her arms.

"'The greatness of my people,'" she quoted softly.

THE END

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